This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

433 06825635 7

R 4 1906

HOSP. BK. & NEWS. SOC.

Funda
ZHD

17/4/06
500

FAMILIAR LETTERS

ON

SACRAMENTS,

ADDRESSED TO THE

PEOPLE OF HIS CHARGE.

BY JESSE FONDA, A. M.

WITH AN

APPENDIX.

"Nihil sine, nihil contra, nihil præter, nihil ultra, divinam scripturam, admittendum."

PRINTED BY WARD M. GAZLA[illegible]
NEWBURGH, N. Y.

1824.

THE NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY
347577
ASTOR, LENOX AND
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS.
1906

Southern District of New-York, ss.

BE IT REMEMBERED, that on the 16th day of October, in the 48th year of the independence of the United States of America, JESSE FONDA, of the said district, hath deposited in this office the title of a book, the right whereof he claims as author, in the words following, to wit:

Familiar Letters on Sacraments, addressed to the people of his charge. By Jesse Fonda, A. M. With an appendix. Nihil sine, nihil contra, nihil præter, nihil ultra, divinam scripturam, admittendum.

In conformity to the Act of Congress of the United States, entitled "An Act for the encouragement of Learning, by securing the copies of Maps, Charts, and Books, to the authors and proprietors of such copies, during the time therein mentioned." And also to an Act, entitled "an Act, supplementary to an act, entitled an Act for the encouragement of Learning, by securing the copies of Maps, Charts, and Books, to the authors and proprietors of such copies, during the time therein mentioned, and extending the benefits thereof to the arts of designing, engraving, and etching historical and other prints."

JAMES DILL,
Clerk of the Southern District of New-York.

CONTENTS.

LETTER I.

Introductory remarks—Importance of the proposed discussion—What may be asserted ought to be compared with Scripture—and the truth is to be received in the love of it. P. 4.

LETTER II.

The term "sacrament"—Nature of sacraments in general—Sacraments of the Old Testament—Circumcision and the Passover. P. 9.

LETTER III.

Baptism and the Lord's Supper have taken the place of Circumcision and the Passover—and are to be observed as standing ordinances in the Christian Church. P. 19.

LETTER IV.

The Abrahamic Covenant—a particular exhibition of the covenant of grace—Requires holiness of heart and practice—Organization of the visible church—The one seal of membership. P. 53.

LETTER V.

Baptism—Sign—Its import—How to be administered—Brief view of John's baptism. P. 56.

LETTER VI.

Subjects of baptism—Adult believers, and their [illegible] P. 74.

LETTER VII.

The right of infants to baptism proved, from the covenant made with Abraham—Their capacity to partake of spiritual blessings—The practice of the Apostles, and the history of the Church. P. 85.

LETTER VIII.

Objections against infant baptism considered and refuted. P. 99.

LETTER IX.

The question 'Whose children have a right to the ordinance of baptism?' considered and answered. P. 108.

LETTER X.

The right and the duty of the church to exercise discipline on baptized members. P. 121.

LETTER XI.

Engagements made by parents when offering up their children in baptism. P. 138.

LETTER XII.

Importance and advantages of baptism. P. 151.

LETTER XIII.

The subject relating to infant baptism pressed upon the consciences of parents—Certain questions proposed for their consideration—Short addresses to professors, and church officers. P. 164.

LETTER XIV.

Sacrament of the Supper, instituted by Christ—Command to observe it binding on all in gospel countries, who have come to years of understanding—especially on baptized persons. P. 174.

LETTER XV.

[illegible]ure of the ordinance of the supper unfolded, by a [illegible]deration of the names applied to it in Scripture. [illegible]6.

LETTER XVI.

The nature of the supper further unfolded, by a consideration of its external signs, and form of administration—A brief view of the absurdity of transubstantiation, and the impiety of the mass—The doctrine of Christ's presence stated. P. 193.

LETTER XVII.

Design of the supper, not to atone for sin, but to commemorate the death of Christ—to seal the blessings of the covenant—to strengthen the faith and animate the hopes of believers—and to promote the exercise of brotherly affection. P. 205.

LETTER XVIII.

Qualifications for the supper—Assent to the doctrines of the church, one of the terms of communion—Nature of an acceptable approach to the table of the Lord. P. 215.

LETTER XIX.

Engagements made at the Redeemer's table—Unfaithfulness of professors—Exhortation to universal and holy obedience, with a few directions. P. 230.

LETTER XX.

Excuses of professors for absenting themselves from the table of the Lord, considered—and the duty of the church in relation to such stated. P. 246.

LETTER XXI.

Serious address to non-communicants—Their excuses answered—their guilt stated—and their duty pointed out—Conclusion. P. 260.

APPENDIX.

1. Remarks on the Importance of Correct Views of [illegible]tem of Revealed Religion. p. 277.

2. *Canons of the* Synod of Dort. p. 293.

3. Sermon on the doctrine of Eternal Election. p. 319.

4. Address on Family Religion. p. 343.

5. Persuasive to Public Worship. p. 359.

N. B.—No reasonable pains have been spared to have the typographical execution of this work correct. Notwithstanding this, a few errors of minor importance have escaped detection.—The reader is requested to bear in mind, that the word *sacraments*, p. 194, line 14, ought to be *elements*—and the words *they do*, p. 258, line 13, ought to be *he does*.

LETTER I.

Introductory remarks—Importance of the proposed discussion—What may be asserted ought to be compared with Scripture—and the truth is to be received in the love of it.

BELOVED PEOPLE,

MORE than six years ago, you were pleased to give me an invitation to labour among you *in word and doctrine;* and in the faithful discharge of the duties of a gospel minister, to *feed the flock, and edify the body of Christ.* In the instrument, with which you then presented me, are these words: "We hereby solemnly, and in the fear of the Lord, do call you, to be our pastor and teacher, to preach the word in truth and faithfulness; to administer the holy sacraments, agreeably to the institution of Christ; to maintain Christian discipline; to edify the congregation, and especially the youth by catechetical instructions; and, as a faithful minister of Jesus Christ, to fulfil the whole work of the gospel ministry; agreeably to the word of God, and the excellent rules and constitution of our Reformed Dutch Church, established at the last national Synod held at Dordrecht, and ratified and explained by the ecclesiastical Judicatory under

which we stand, and to which you, upon accepting this call, must with us remain subordinate."

The acceptance of such a call, and the assumption of such engagements, you will do me the justice to believe, filled my mind at the time with deep anxiety; and has to this day engaged my meditations, my exertions, and my prayers, that I may approve myself both to you and my Master, a faithful *steward of the mysteries of God.*

With my professional services, both in and out of the pulpit, you are generally acquainted; and my family, and my closet can testify that I have not ceased to remember you in my prayers to God, day and night, that you may be established in the truth and order of the gospel—be built up in faith and holiness—and at last be saved, with exceeding joy and eternal glory.

Nothing but a continued regard for the welfare of your souls, and the prosperity of our Zion, has induced me to address to you these familiar and pastoral letters; in which, I do not expect to advance much, if any thing new, on the subjects to which they relate, but to put into your hands, in a cheap form, important and seasonable truths, which, perhaps, otherwise would not come under your observation. The character of these letters will satisfy you that I expect not to acquire celebrity as an author, by their publication. It is an humble attempt to do you good, and managed in a way which to me appeared best calculated to accomplish so desirable object.

The particular subject on which I design to address you is the DOCTRINE of SACRAMENTS, especially those of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, as required to be observed by the church of Christ under the evangelical dispensation.

This is a subject at once deeply interesting to me, and highly important to you. No act of worship in which the church on earth engages is more solemn in its nature, or connected with more high and sacred responsibilities, than the administration and reception of sealing ordinances. The dedication of our tender offspring to the living God in baptism, and the consecration of ourselves to Him at the Redeemer's table, are scenes which may well engage the attention, and interest the feelings of the angels of glory; and which nothing but the most consummate depravity can treat with irreverence, or even contemplate with indifference.

Baptism and the Lord's Supper are not *human institutions*—they are not *customs* of the church handed down by parents to their children,—they are holy ordinances of God's house, established by the authority of Jesus Christ, who will shortly be your Judge and my Judge: And as you have made it one of the stipulations of the call you have given me, that I shall "*administer the holy sacraments agreeably to the institution of Christ,*" nothing can be more proper than that we should enquire *what the will of Christ, in relation to these institutions, is?* To me, moreover, there appears to be a peculiar necessity for this. The state of things among us

loudly calls for such an investigation. For it is too evident to be denied, that not a few among us feel a strong desire to enjoy the external rites of sacraments, without manifesting a proper concern as to the manner in which they are dispensed. Such, it would certainly be desirable to convince that sacraments can be of no use to us, or our children; if administered contrary to the direction of their Divine Author, and in a way which profanes *them*, and dishonours and insults *Him*.—Instead of securing blessings, they must draw down curses. Jesus Christ cannot smile on an act, upon which his holiness requires him to frown. If we commune unworthily, "we eat and drink judgment to ourselves." And if we make an improper, unworthy, and hypocritical presentation of our children, we no less expose ourselves, and our children too, to the sore displeasure of that God, who has declared himself *jealous of his honour*, and who has loudly proclaimed *that he will be sanctified in all those who approach him, and before all the people he will be glorified*—"Holiness becometh thine house, O Lord, forever." "This is the law of the house; upon the top of the mountain, the whole limit thereof, round about, shall BE MOST HOLY. Behold, this is the law of the house!"* "To the wicked God saith, what hast thou to do that thou——shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth?"†

---

* Ezek. xl. 12. † Ps. l. 16.

Further: Let it be remembered, that neither the number of baptisms, nor even the number of communicants, in any church, can of themselves furnish evidence of the true prosperity of that church; but may, on the contrary, furnish matter of awful boding and fearful apprehension to the pious and contemplative mind; for if it should happen that the sacraments are perverted and profaned, the guilty individuals will not only be punished, but the church, in which such profanations are tolerated, must speedily sink into decay and ruin. She may, indeed, for a while retain the form of godliness; but even that cannot long survive the wreck of holiness, and the desecration of sealing ordinances.

And, brethren, are we not in imminent danger of falling into this condemnation? Nay; are we not already ripe for vengeance? You have engaged me to administer the supper four times in the course of every year; while you need not be told, that applications for baptism are very numerous, as might be expected, in a congregation including more than three hundred families, and in which almost every parent judges himself entitled, and qualified to offer up his child in that holy ordinance. "Let us search and try our ways." "Wash you, make you clean: Put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well.*

I, therefore, earnestly request and beseech you to examine what may be advanced in relation to these

---

*Isa. i. 16, 17.

matters, in the light of God's word, under a deep impression that eternal consequences are at stake, and with a prayerful heart for the teachings of that Spirit, whose office it is to lead into all truth.

Not only permit this little work to enter your dwellings; but give it an attentive, serious, and prayerful perusal. Compare the sentiments which are advanced, with the word of God, and the standards of our church, which, as you profess to believe, are founded on the word of God. Decide not upon the matters herein set forth under the influence of the prejudices of education, or the force of practices which the following investigation may prove to have been incorrect, unscriptural, and wicked; but go to the law and the testimony. Search the scriptures, and see whether these things be so. Weigh every thing you find here in the balance of the sanctuary. Let God be true, and every man a liar!

One word more, and I close this introductory paper. I hope that you will accept this attempt to serve you as a labour of love; and be assured that the religious public, and the God of the religious public, will only consider it as evidence of your unkindness and ingratitude *if you judge me to be your enemy, because I tell you the truth.*

May the blessing of Abraham's God, who is also the God of Abraham's seed, rest upon you and upon yours.

Montgomery, Sept. 1, 1823.

LETTER II.

The term Sacrament—Nature of sacraments in general—Sacraments of the Old Testament—Circumcision, and the Passover.

BELOVED PEOPLE,

HIGH importance is deservedly attached to *scripture terms* in discussions relating to the doctrines or institutions of religion. No reasonable objection, however, can be urged against the use of any term, as a matter of convenience, which is evidently and entirely scriptural in its signification. The term *Trinity* is no where found in the inspired volume; and yet it so completely expresses the meaning of that remarkable passage* "There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, and these three are one," that every friend of the Bible must be convinced that nothing is lost, while much is gained, by its adoption. A tedious circumlocution is avoided, without the least prejudice to the cause of truth.

A similar remark may be made concerning the term *sacrament*, which we now propose to consider. That it does not occur in the Bible, you are perfectly aware; and the fact that it conveys no other idea than what scripture justifies and sanctions, you are prepared to consider, a sufficient warrant for its early

* 1 Jo. v. 7.

and continued application, to the sealing ordinances of God's house.

According to some writers, this term *sacrament* is derived from the Latin verb *sacrare*, which signifies to consecrate or dedicate; and well expresses the sincere and unreserved surrender, which the believer makes of himself to God in the use of covenant seals.

The general opinion however is, that the term we are considering, is derived from the Latin noun *sacramentum*, which denotes an oath of fidelity; particularly the oath which the Roman soldiers took at the time of enlistment.

Of the precise nature, and binding power of this oath, historians give us information. "Polybius,* in giving an account of the manner of raising, embodying, and enrolling the Roman troops, observes, that, when all the arrangements were made, and the different companies formed, the *chiliarch*, or military tribune, selecting a proper person from all the rest, propounded the *sacramentum*, or oath of fidelity and obedience; who immediately swore, *submissively to obey and perform whatever was commanded by the officers to the utmost of his power;* after which, all the rest, coming forward one by one, made oath that they would perform every thing according to what the first had sworn." Gibbon, in his Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire,† tells us, that the Ro-

---

* As quoted by Bayard, in his Letters on the Sacrament, p. 111.

† Vol. I. p. 16. See Bayard's Letters, p. 112.

man soldier, upon his first entrance into service, had an oath (sacramentum) administered to him with every circumstance of solemnity. He promised never to desert his standard—to submit his own will to the commands of his leaders—and to sacrifice his life for the safety of the Emperor, and the Empire.

The historian Pliny, too, in one of his letters to the Emperor Trajan, states, that the Christians in his province, when they came together on a set and solemn day, (no doubt the Lord's day), having sung a hymn in honour of Christ, bound themselves by an oath (se obstringere sacramento) not to commit any wickedness, to love each other as brethren, &c.

From these quotations, it is evident that the leading idea designed to be conveyed by the term sacrament, as applied to the seals of God's covenant, is that of *sworn fidelity* to the Lord Jesus Christ, and the interests of his kingdom: That we will not desert the standard of the cross—that we will love the truths, and keep the commandments of Zion's King—and hold all that we are, and all that we have, under sacred consecration to the promotion of his cause and the advancement of his glory.

It is not necessary to enquire at what particular period of the Christian church this term was first applied to the sacred institutions of baptism and the Lord's supper. It is a well established fact, that while the Greek fathers used the term Μυστηρια, *mysteries*, the fathers of the Latin church early adopted the word *sacramentum*, *sacrament*, to denote those *sealing ordinances* of our holy religion, in which

Christians bind themselves publicly, and *under the solemnity of an oath*, to be the Lord's entirely and forever.

What an impressive idea does this view of the term sacrament give us of those solemn transactions, in which we offer up our children to God in baptism, and receive at the Redeemer's table the memorials of his broken body and shed blood; and what a chilling representation does it make of the exceeding sinfulness of those "who swear by the name of the Lord, and make mention of the God of Israel, but not in truth nor in righteousness."* Shall not the soul of the Lord be avenged on him that sweareth falsely—on him who, at the baptism of his child, or the communion-table, takes the oath of fidelity, but continues to live in the wanton profanation of God's name and day—in the neglect of public and family worship—and the commission of vile offences? Pause, reader; and as you dread the displeasure of the Almighty, let me entreat you not to vow unless you mean to pay what you have vowed unto the Lord.† So says the wise man,‡ "When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: Pay that which thou hast vowed. Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow, and not pay."

Let this suffice with regard to the *term*. We now proceed to enquire more particularly into the nature of these holy institutions. "Sacraments, according

* Isa. xlviii. 1. † Ps. lxxvi. 11. ‡ Eccles. v. 4, 5.

to our excellent Heidelbergh Catechism, "are visible signs and seals appointed of God for this end, that, by the use thereof, he may the more fully declare and seal to us the promise of the gospel; to wit, that he grants us freely the remission of sins, and life eternal, for the sake of that one sacrifice of Christ, accomplished on the cross." With this perfectly agrees the statement given of sacraments by the Westminster Divines in their larger Catechism, and also by the Church of England. The former say,* "a sacrament is an holy ordinance, instituted by Christ in his church, to signify, seal, and exhibit to those who are within the covenant of grace the benefits of his mediation; to strengthen and increase their faith, and all other graces; to oblige them to obedience; to testify and cherish their love and communion one with another, and to distinguish them from those that are without." The latter says,† "a sacrament is an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace given unto us, ordained by Christ himself, as a means whereby we receive the same, and a pledge to assure us thereof."

Sacraments, then, according to these several definitions, are signs and seals of God's grace, ordained by Christ; in the reception of which the Christian solemnly owns God as his God and portion, and devotes himself to his service and glory.

In the proper use of sacraments, God makes himself over to us, and we surrender ourselves up to

* Quest. clxii.
† Catechism, to be learnt by such as wish confirmation.

him in the bonds of a covenant never to be forgotten.

1. They are signs.—In the administration of sacraments, spiritual benefits, particularly the righteousness and grace of the Lord Jesus Christ for the justification and sanctification of his people, are represented by material objects and visible actions. God thus symbolically declares all men are by nature and practice guilty and depraved; that the merit of Christ's blood, and the efficacy of his grace, alone can remove their guilt and depravity; and that, on these accounts, he, as the God that keepeth covenant, becomes their God, and receives them as his people.

2. Sacraments are also *seals*.—"Abraham received the sign of circumcision, a *seal of the righteousness* of the faith which he had, yet being uncircumcised."* Not only do sacraments *exhibit* the benefits resulting from the Saviour's mediatorial undertaking; but they sensibly *confirm* God's covenant with believers, furnish them with the strongest pledge of their interest in the benefits represented by them, and thus strengthen their confidence in the special love and unchanging faithfulness of their heavenly Father. So says our Confession of Faith.† "We believe that our gracious God, on account of our weakness and infirmities, hath ordained the sacraments for us, thereby to seal to us his promises, and to be pledges of the good-will and grace of God

* Rom. iv. 11.

† Art. xxxiii.

towards us, and also to nourish and strengthen our faith; which he hath joined to the word of the gospel, the better to present to our senses both that which he signifies to us by his word, and that which he works inwardly in our hearts, thereby assuring and confirming in us the salvation which he imparts to us. For they are visible signs and seals of an inward and invisible thing, by means whereof God worketh in us by the power of the Holy Ghost."

Such, then, is the nature of sacraments. They are *sensible* confirmations of divine goodness, and visible pledges of offered blessings. The reception of the pledges is the public acceptance of the blessings, on the terms on which they are proposed,—or, in other words, the reception of the pledges is a solemn engagement to comply with the terms of the covenant, of which they are the divinely appointed seals.

Such institutions, you cannot fail to notice, are well adapted to the constitution of man. Most of our impressions are received through the organs of our bodies; and in the use of sacraments the senses of our body are made, in an eminent degree, assistant to the devotions of our souls.

It has therefore pleased that God, "who knows our frame," always to deal with man in the form of a covenant, and to confirm his engagements by sensible objects or sacramental signs. In the covenant of works made with Adam, our common parent and representative, *the tree of life* was a *visible assurance*

that eternal blessedness should be the reward of obedience.

In the covenant with Noah, God said, "Behold I place my bow in the clouds,"—and to this day the bow of God in the clouds is a token of God's providential favour, and a sure pledge that the earth shall not again be destroyed by water.

So also, when the covenant of grace was, in consequence of the violation of the covenant of works, brought into operation, by the divine announcement that "the seed of the woman should bruise the head of the serpent," sacrifices partaking of the character of sacraments immediately came into use, by the appointment of the divine lawgiver; and, indeed, it is contended by some that all the ceremonies of the typical worship as observed under the Mosaic economy, are to be considered as sacramental ordinances. "The law had a shadow of good things to come, Heb. x. 1.

The ordinances, however, of the Old Testament dispensation, which are especially to be regarded as sacraments of the covenant of grace, in that day, were circumcision and the passover. These were the ordinary sacraments of the Jewish church.

The former of these was instituted in the time of the patriarch Abraham, in whose family God organized his visible church, making *circumcision*, a badge of membership, and a seal of the righteousness of faith. This sacrament was by express command of Jehovah, applied to the seed of the believer as well as to the believer himself—the right of children to

church membership was then clearly established and must remain valid unless the privilege has been revoked by him who originally granted it. The grant was unequivocal, nay, the injunction was peremptory. "*Every man-child shall be circumcised on the eighth day. The uncircumcised man-child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant.*"* But more of this hereafter.

The sacrament of the *passover* was instituted at a later day, and not until the time of the departure of the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt. God being about to bring on the oppressors of his people the tenth and sorest plague, directed the children of Israel to sprinkle with the blood of a lamb the posts of their doors, which *sprinkling of blood*, was to be to them a sign and seal of their perfect safety in that awful night when the sword of the destroying angel was to be bathed in the blood of all the first born in the land of Egypt, both of man and beast. Hence it was called the *passover*—they escaped unhurt; and while the voice of bitter lamentation was heard in the dwellings of the Egyptians, the voice of rejoicing was heard in the tabernacles of God's people. This signal deliverance, typical of a deliverance incomparibly more signal, the covenant people of God were commanded to commemorate in the devout celebration of the ordinance of the passover. "Thou shalt therefore keep this ordinance, in his season from year to year."†

*Gen. xvii. 10, 14. †Exo. xiii. 10.

These ordinances, of circumcision and the passover, it cannot have escaped your observation, were of a *bloody nature*, exhibiting the grand truth, "that without shedding of blood there is no remission of sin," and partaking of the general character of the typical dispensation. In both circumcision and the passover *blood* was shed; and so the passion and and death of the Lord Jesus Christ were prefigured in these rites, as well as his righteousness and grace signified and sealed. This being the fact, there was a necessity that these ordinances should be limited in their use to the period of the Old Testament dispensation; and that after the coming and death of Jesus Christ, the antitype, *they*, as well as every thing else, having a typical allusion to those interesting events, should be abolished.

The church indeed is essentially the same, and so are the benefits of the covenant of grace, under every dispensation. So also are the things signified by sacraments. But in the external form and mode of administering sacraments, a suitableness to the particular dispensation of the church at any particular period is reasonably to be expected. An intelligent worshipper under the law, looking for Messiah, as "the hope of Israel, and the Saviour thereof," might, in that day of comparative darkness, have discovered the propriety and even necessity of abrogating, whenever these fond hopes of the church should have been realized, the whole Mosaic economy, and with it the sacraments of circumcision and the passover; so that ordinances better adapted to

the genius of the evangelical dispensation might be substituted in their place.

Upon examining the word of God, we find that what might thus reasonably have been expected before the coming of Messiah has, since his advent and sacrifice, actually taken place; and that Baptism and the Lord's Supper have, by the appointment of the great Head of the Church, superseded the Jewish ordinances, which we have just considered. The proof of this I design to place before you in my next letter.

LETTER III.

Baptism and the Lord's Supper have taken the place of Circumcision and the Passover; and are to be observed as standing ordinances in the Christian Church.

BELOVED PEOPLE,

My last paper closed with the assertion, that, by the appointment of Jesus Christ, Baptism and the Lord's Supper, under the new dispensation, have taken the place, which was occupied by circumcision and the passover under the old. This assertion I shall now undertake to maintain and establish; which will prepare the way for a few remarks on our duty in relation to baptism and the supper, as standing ordinances in the Christian Church.

With regard to the substitution of the Lord's supper, in the place of the Jewish passover, I believe but one sentiment prevails in the Christian world; at least, the denial of this fact has never fallen under my observation: And, indeed, the language of inspiration is so explicit on this point, that there is no room even for doubt, much less for denial. The Apostle Paul, in speaking of the supper, has settled this point, by stiling *Christ the Christian Passover.* "For even Christ, our passover, is sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."*

But it is evident that the same interested motives have not been called into operation on this point, which have been suffered to darken the understanding and bias the judgment, in relation to the other. You well know, that a determination to unchurch infants, and to withhold from them the initiatory seal of baptism, renders it necessary for antipedobaptists to deny that baptism has taken the place of circumcision; and, I think, there is but too much reason to suspect, that, in relation to this subject, they have pursued a course altogether unauthorized by the laws of correct reasoning, and legitimate induction; and that, instead of beginning by ascertaining facts, and then proceeding to deduce fair inferences, the Baptists have, in this instance, at

* 1 Cor. v. 7, 8.

least, begun by assuming an inference, after which they had nothing to do but to accommodate facts to their assumption.

I question very much, indeed, whether any man ever denied the propriety of infant baptism because he conscientiously, and in the first place, disbelieved that baptism has come in the place of circumcision:—and I just as strongly question, whether any man ever denied the fact, that baptism has taken the place of circumcision, without having previously made up his mind that children must not be baptized.

This kind of management, you may have noticed, is quite common, both as it respects practice and theory. Men not unfrequently act, and then look for reasons to *justify their conduct*; and so, also, men not unfrequently decide on subjects, and then go in pursuit of something to support their decision, while every thing which proves it to be erroneous must be tortured into compliance, or silenced at a blow. So in the case before us.—Let a man, at a leap, reach the case of the infant—let him strip him of the privilege of church-membership, and the right of baptism; and when this is settled, he has but one course to pursue, unless he is willing to forfeit all claim to consistency; and that is, to deny the fact that circumcision has yielded its place to baptism.

Be this as it may, the fact, which we have asserted, admits of clear and most satisfactory proof.—For 1. A presumptive argument of no inconsider-

able weight may be drawn from the acknowledged fact, *that the Lord's supper has taken the place of the passover.*

The argument stands thus.

Under the Old Testament dispensation there were two sacraments of God's covenant,—viz. circumcision, and the passover.

Under the New Testament dispensation there are also two sacraments of God's covenant,—viz. baptism, and the Lord's supper.

But the Lord's supper now occupies the place formerly held by the passover.

The inference, therefore, to say the least, is *plausible*, that baptism now occupies the place formerly held by circumcision.

2. *Circumcision and baptism both answer the same end, and signify and seal precisely the same benefits, under their respective dispensations.*—Circumcision was an initiatory ordinance in the Jewish church; so is baptism in the Christian church. Circumcision was a sign and seal of spiritual blessings—viz. the righteousness of Christ, and the sanctification of the Holy Ghost; so is baptism under the dispensation of the gospel. It occupies the same place, and answers the same end, that circumcision did formerly. Its use and meaning are the same to the Christian, that those of circumcision were to the Jew. The one is a substitute for the other. This is plainly taught by the Apostle, in his epistle to the Colossians, ii. ch. 11 and 12. His words are these —*In whom also ye are circumcised, with the circum-*

cision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ. Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.

In these words, the Apostle speaks of *a circumcision made without hands*, and of *a baptism, by which we are buried with Christ, and also raised with him, through the faith of the operation of God;* that is, circumcision of the heart, and baptism of the heart, which mean precisely the same thing,—viz. the renewal of our nature by the operation of divine grace. "Paul then declares, a believer's sanctification, in virtue of union with Christ, to be represented by both circumcision and baptism; for he expresses his doctrine by both these terms indifferently, and annexes to both the same spiritual signification: He has, therefore, identified the two ordinances; and by demonstrating that they have one and the same use and meaning, he has exhibited to our view the very same seal of God's covenant, under the forms of circumcision and baptism, respectively. But, as the same thing cannot subsist in different forms at the same time; and as the first form, viz. circumcision, is laid aside—it follows, that the seal of God's covenant is perpetuated under the second form, which is baptism, and which signifies and seals in a manner suited to the evangelical dispensation, what as previously signified and sealed by the rite of circumcision. The conclusion is evident. Baptism is the *Christian* circumcision; the

sign of baptism is the *Christian* form of sealing God's covenant, and as such has taken place of circumcision."*

Upon all this, the decision of the council at Jerusalem, of which we have an account in the xvth chapter of Acts, furnishes a practical comment. They decided, that it was not necessary that the converts from Paganism should be circumcised; and that for this plain reason, they had *already been baptized*; and their baptism answered the same purpose, and signified and sealed the same blessings, which circumcision formerly did. They had already received the *substitute* for circumcision; and it would therefore be unnecessary, as well as improper, to subject them to an abrogated form.

3. Our third argument in support of our assertion is this. *If baptism has not come in the place of circumcision, the church of God has at present no initiating seal.* Circumcision, the bloody seal of inauguration, has been abolished, and had to be abolished at the dawn of the gospel period of the church; and has the Head of the Church left her *comfortless* in this respect? Has the evangelical dispensation under which we *expect*, and in all other matters, *find* an extension of privilege, operated in this particular to the disadvantage of the church, by depriving her members of the sensible token of their covenant relation to Jehovah? It cannot be. Baptists themselves practically declare, that it is not so. Yes, we

---

* Christian's Magazine, Vol. I. 394.

call to our aid the *practice* of the *Baptists* themselves to prove, that their sentiments on this point are entirely incorrect, and that our assertion is founded in truth; for they themselves use and apply baptism as an *initiatory* seal, and by so doing assign to it the place which was formerly occupied by circumcision. When a heathen embraced the Jewish religion, how did they receive such proselyte? Why, they circumcised him. When a sinner is regenerated, how do the Baptists receive such convert? Why, they baptize him. Baptism, administered by immersion, is with them the seal of inauguration; and until this seal has been applied, they will not suffer the person, although an acknowledged believer, to take his place at the Redeemer's table. It is upon this principle that they refuse to join with us in commemorating the death of the Saviour. They acknowledge us sound in the faith, and do not pretend that we are destitute of true piety; but our baptism, administered by sprinkling, and perhaps in infancy, is good for nothing. We are *unbaptized*—we are without the seal of church-membership—and therefore have no right to commune. All this is consistent, although it is a consistency in error; and all this powerfully establishes our assertion, that baptism is the *Christian circumcision*, as the Lord's supper is the *Christian* passover.

Having established the fact, that circumcision and the passover have resigned their place to baptism and the Lord's supper, it now only remains to be enquired, whether it was the design of their Divine

Author that the observance of the latter should terminate with the Apostolic age; or be perpetuated and solemnized in his church by every successive generation of his people until the end of time, and the consummation of all terrestrial things.

In reading the New Testament scriptures, it must have occurred to you that certain ceremonies and rites, practised in the days of the Apostles, are not observed in our day, especially by the churches of the Reformation; and you may perhaps have heard it asserted, that baptism and the Lord's supper ought, long since, to have shared the same fate, and to have been denounced by the Christian Church as *carnal ordinances*, incompatible with the spiritual character of the evangelical dispensation.—Let us spend a moment in the investigation of this matter.

It will not be denied, that certain ceremonies of a local character, and proper in the Apostolic age, have, in consequence of the spread of the gospel, been with propriety discontinued; not because the church has since that period increased in *spirituality*, but because the particular circumstances, which brought them into existence, have ceased. Among the observances of that day, with which the opposers of ordinances in general, attempt to identify baptism and the supper, are commonly mentioned, *the anointing of the sick with oil, the celebration of love feasts, and the washing of feet.* These are no longer practised; and because these are not, baptism and the supper ought also to be abolished.—Indeed?—And does neglect in one instance justify

neglect in every instance? Does the discontinuance of one rite, sanction the discontinuance of every rite? This is strange logic!—But let us see, whether there was not something in the very nature of those observances, which have been discontinued, altogether different from what we find in the sacraments of baptism and the supper; and which rendered it proper, that, while the former were suffered to go into disuse, the latter should be strictly and solemnly observed, until the end of time.

1. With regard to the *unction of the sick.*—"Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil, in the name of the Lord."* From this command, the church of Rome derives her authority for *extreme unction*, one of her *seven* sacraments. But, surely, it requires only a very moderate degree of reflection to be convinced, that, that injunction could, in the very nature of things, be binding only during the age of miraculous gifts, while the power of healing diseases rested on the church; and that there would be a palpable impropriety in making use of such a sign now, when the power to heal the sick is no longer conferred.

2. With respect to the practice of celebrating *love-feasts*, I observe, in general, that they appear to have been altogether a human observance, although, no doubt, originally of a charitable character. "To these *love-feasts* all the poor were invited, at the charges of the rich, as an expression of their perfect

* James v. 14.

love and charity one towards another." But the celebration of these feasts, particularly in the Corinthian church, soon lead to irregularity and excess; and it accordingly became necessary, from prudential considerations, and a regard to Christian propriety, to lay them aside.

3. The *washing of feet*, still practised in the church of Rome, on the Thursday of *passion week*, claims for its authority the example and command of our Saviour, recorded in the thirteenth chapter of John's Gospel. Our Saviour, at the celebration of the Passover, washed the feet of his disciples; and, having done so, made this improvement of the ceremony. "If I, then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet."* Whatever Christ meant by this remark, it is to be presumed that the Apostles understood him. But no evidence can be found in the sacred volume, that the Apostles ever practised the washing of feet among themselves. It is therefore highly probable, that our Saviour performed a ceremony, at once menial, and yet, in that country, viewed as an act of hospitality, to impress upon the minds of his disciples the important lessons of humility and brotherly affection; and that the spirit of the ceremony, and not the ceremony itself, is what Christ designed to perpetuate, when he observed, "Ye also ought to wash one another's feet.—The remark of Scott, on this passage, is satisfactory. "There is no ground (says he) in Scripture for un-

* Ver. 14.

derstanding this injunction literally, nor any trace of its having been observed, *as a religious ordinance*, among the primitive Christians: But, the plain meaning is, that the most eminent Christian, or minister, by whatever title distinguished—not only if a successor to the Apostles, but even an Apostle himself—ought readily to perform the meanest, the most laborious, and the most disgusting act of real charity, to the least of his brethren, when there is a proper call to it."

These remarks will, I trust, convince you, that every attempt to banish from the Christian Church the sacraments of baptism and the supper, by a reference to the practices above alluded to, must be as unsuccessful as it is impious. The very phraseology employed by the Lord Jesus, in the institution of both these ordinances, incontestibly proves, that it was his design that they should be *standing* ordinances in his church, to be solemnly observed by the successive members of that church until the end of time. Attend to the commission, which Christ gave his Apostles, Matthew xxviii. 19, 20. "Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and lo! I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.' This is the authority by which we preach the gospel; and this is the authority by which we administer the sacrament of baptism. Both are done under the high commission of Heaven, and at the express

command of Him, who has purchased the church with his blood; and who, as her exalted Head, continues to guard her interests, and bless her ordinances; yea, who has expressly engaged to be with his ministering servants in every age, both when preaching his word, and administering baptism—*alway, even unto the end of the world.* So long, then, as it will be a duty to preach the gospel under this commission, and animated by this promise; so long will it be a duty to administer baptism, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; that is, in both cases, as long as time endures.

Turn now to the institution of the supper, as recorded by Luke xxii. 19, 20. "And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body, which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. Likewise also the cup, after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you." And to shew how long the church is to do this in remembrance of her Lord, Paul, who, it seems, had received special revelation on the subject, remarks 1 Cor. xi. 23—26. "For I have received of the Lord that which I also delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus, the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread; and, when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood; this do ye, as oft as ye

drink it, in remembrance of me: For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death *till he come.*" So long, then, as Christ has a people on earth, whose duty it shall be affectionately and gratefully to remember his sufferings and death, as their surety—so long as he delays his coming in the character of final and all-righteous Judge—so long will it be the duty of his people to shew forth his death in this affecting ordinance; *even until he come.*

After these statements, it is scarcely necessary to remark, that men, who decry ordinances, and especially rail at baptism and the Lord's supper as altogether of too gross a character to suit the spiritual dispensation of the gospel, display a very moderate share of modesty, and most manifestly fall under the condemnation of pretending to be wise above what is written. A little reflection on the constitution of man, as well as a little attention to the uniform dealings of God with the Church, we would suppose sufficient to convince such, that ordinances and external observances, unnecessary in the religion of spirits, are indispensably necessary in a religion for creatures, constituted as we are at present. So long as our minds are, for the most part, to be operated on through the medium of our senses, so long the externals of religion must be useful, and highly important. And while we are ready to acknowledge that the *form* of religion without the *power* is worth nothing, and that the subject of such a religion is but *a sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal*, we are not

disposed to set a much higher value on the religion of those, who, under an affected simplicity, and great appearance of devotion, neglect and even despise the sacred institutions of the Lord Jesus Christ; and profanely endeavour to exclude, from the worship of God's house, those sealing ordinances, which were designed by their Divine Author to run parallel with the dispensation of the gospel.

I therefore close this paper, by impressing it on your conscience that the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's supper are as binding now as ever; and that it is as much the duty of the friends of the Lord Jesus to honour him in the holy observance of these ordinances now, as it was the duty of the Apostles, and their fellow Christians, to do it at the commencement of the gospel age.

LETTER IV.

The Abrahamic covenant—a particular exhibition of the covenant of grace—requires holiness of heart and practice—Organization of the visible church—the one seal of membership.

BELOVED PEOPLE,

We have just ascertained, that baptism and the Lord's supper occupy the same place, and answer the same purposes, under the present dispensation, which were occupied and answered by circumcision and the passover under the old. We now propose to consider a special use, which was formerly contemplated in the administration of circumcision, and which is now to be had in view in the administration of baptism.

This will render it necessary for us to go back to the institution of circumcision, and to take a view of the covenant of which it was the divinely appointed token and seal. The seventeenth chapter of Genesis will furnish us with all necessary information in this important enquiry; and convince us that, that chapter deservedly ranks among the most interesting portions of the inspired volume. The Abrahamic covenant will ever be viewed, by all who are capable of appreciating its benefits, as one of the precious engagements of the God of grace. It is the charter of the visible church, and secures to her, her dearest privileges. "And when Abram was

ninety years old and nine, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God: Walk before me, and be thou perfect. And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly. And Abram fell on his face; and God talked with him, saying, As for me, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations. Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee. And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee; and kings shall come out of thee. And I will establish my covenant between me and thee, and thy seed after thee, in their generations, for an everlasting covenant; to be a God unto thee, and thy seed after thee. And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God. And God said unto Abraham, thou shalt keep my covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee, in their generations. This is my covenant, which ye shall keep between me and you, and thy seed after thee: Every man-child among you shall be circumcised. And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your fore-skin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you. And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every man-child in your generations; he that is born in the house, or bought with money of any stranger, which is not of thy seed. He that is born in thy house, and he that is

bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised; and my covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. And the uncircumcised man-child, whose flesh of his fore-skin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant." Ver. 1—14.

The narrative thus given by Moses of this solemn transaction, suggests to us the following important facts; which, as first principles, will be found of great use in all our subsequent remarks on the sacrament of baptism.

1. *The covenant, which God made with Abraham, was a particular exhibition of the covenant of grace.*

Much has been written, and more has been said, to obscure and destroy the gracious character of the Abrahamic covenant; and to degrade it into a *national* covenant, designed only to secure temporal benefits to the descendants of Abraham. Frequently the attempt has been made to identify this covenant, in its nature and design, with the covenant made with the nation at Mount Sinai; and then to infer its abolition as a necessary consequence of the abrogation of the ceremonial worship. But the Apostle Paul has plainly drawn the line of distinction between these covenants; and as plainly denied that the abrogation of the ceremonial law has terminated the existence, or in the least degree interfered with the operation, of the Abrahamic covenant. "And this I say, That the covenant that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot

disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect."*

Here observe, that the Apostle does not only distinguish between the Abrahamic covenant, and the covenant at Sinai, expressly declaring that the abolition of the latter does not effect the existence of the former; but he positively asserts, that the covenant made with Abraham was *confirmed in Christ*, the Mediator of the covenant of grace, and, of course, that the Abrahamic covenant is substantially the same with the covenant of grace. For this same truth the Apostle contends in his Epistle to the Romans:† "For the promise that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the *righteousness of faith.* Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace." If this be not a recognition of the covenant of grace, and of the benefits it confers; we shall be at a loss to find a trace of the covenant of grace in any part of the inspired volume.

But let us turn to the covenant itself, as described by Moses, and see whether, in the very terms of the covenant, there is not the most satisfactory evidence of its gracious character. Its grand promise is, "I will be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee."‡ Here God, unconditionally, makes himself over to Abraham, and his spiritual seed, in all the plenitude of his perfections and grace, so far as is necessary to the happiness of an intelligent creature.—*I will be thy God, and I will be the God of thy seed.* But

* Gal. iii. 17. † Rom. iv. 13, 16. ‡ Verse 7.

can God, the holy God, against whom we all have sinned—Can God, I ask, make such engagements to any member of the human family, irrespective of the covenant of grace, and the mediation of the Lord Jesus Christ? If so; then away with the covenant of grace, and the mediation of Christ: they are both unnecessary.—While I reverence the superior piety of Abraham, I am not disposed to yield the point, that he could be saved independently of the covenant of grace, and the mediation of Christ, any more than I can! If he could get to heaven without Christ, and the *well-ordered covenant,* so can I; and so can you. But depend upon it, reader, Abraham does not thank the man, who would represent God as becoming his God in any other than a way of grace. Every such attempt he views as an injury done to the God of his salvation, and as an unholy interference with the song of praise which he unceasingly raises before the throne of God and the Lamb—"*Grace, grace unto it!*" The reformer Luther frequently observed, "I will have nothing to do with an *absolute* God." And the uniform representations, made by scripture, of God's holiness and justice, teach us to believe, that all negotiations and intercourse between the righteous God and fallen man must be conducted on principles of grace and mercy. The covenant with Abraham must therefore have been a dispensation of the covenant of grace.

But some may urge, as an objection to this view of the Abrahamic covenant, that it evidently in-

cluded temporal benefits. *The promise of a numerous posterity; the land of Canaan for a possession,* &c. were a part of this covenant. We readily admit the fact without, however, consenting to the use designed to be made of it. Does the promise of temporal blessings destroy, or in the least interfere with, the gracious character of the Abrahamic covenant? Admit this, and away goes the covenant of grace, *root and branch!* We have been taught to view the covenant of grace as a merciful arrangement, for the glory of God, in the happiness of man, and adapted in all its parts to the condition and circumstances of man; making provision for the present life, as a state of preparation; as well as for the life to come, as the state of perfect enjoyment. If we have correctly understood our bible, the promise "Bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure,"* is an important part of the covenant of grace. And full confident am I that the Apostle did not consider himself as tarnishing the glory of the covenant of grace, when he made this assertion, "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the *life that now is*, and of that which is to come."† But if this inspired Apostle happened to be mistaken—surely the Great Teacher, come from God, himself the Mediator of the covenant of grace, could not have been mistaken as to the provisions of that covenant, when he said, "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things (food, raiment, &c.) shall be added unto

* Isa. xxxiii. 16. † 1 Tim. iv. 8.

you."* Temporal blessings are, then, a part of the covenant of grace; and the circumstance that the Abrahamic covenant included temporal benefits, so far from militating against its gracious character, furnishes new evidence of the correctness of our assertion, *that it was a particular exhibition of the covenant of grace.*

2. *The covenant, made with Abraham, requires holiness of heart and practice.* This remark, indeed, is no more than a fair and legitimate inference from the fact we have just established. The great design of the covenant of grace is to glorify the perfections of Jehovah, in the salvation of man. But the perfections of Jehovah cannot be honoured, if man be saved in any other than a way of holiness. "Without holiness no one can see the Lord."† The subjects of electing love were "from the beginning chosen to salvation, *through sanctification of the spirit and belief of the truth.*"‡ The subjects of effectual calling have been "called not unto uncleanness, but unto holiness."‖ And one of the leading directions of the gospel is, "As he which hath called you is holy; so be ye also holy in all manner of conversation: Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy."§

Sanctification or holiness is, then, one of the leading benefits of the covenant of grace; for this it makes provision, and this it always confers on the

---

* Mat. vi. 33. † Heb. xii. 14. ‡ 2 Thess. ii. 13.
‖ 1 Thess. iv. 7. § 1 Pet. i. 15, 16.

heirs of glory, as an indispensable prerequisite to heavenly felicity.

The Abrahamic covenant, too, demands sanctification. Its grand term is "Walk before me, and be thou perfect."* This command evidently implies reconciliation with God, through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. "For how can two walk together, except they be agreed?"† It implies the sincere exercise of repentance for sin, together with a life of holy and persevering obedience to the divine law. In one word, it requires that the subject should be a "new creature, created in Christ Jesus unto good works;" having the understanding enlightened, the heart sanctified, and the practice regulated by the grace of God.

This is what the covenant made with Abraham demands, as necessary to a real interest in its benefits; and all who are possessed of these high and holy qualifications shall experience a happy fulfilment of all its promises in their largest extent. God will be their God forever and ever; their guide unto death; and their portion beyond the grave.

But while *real* holiness is necessary to secure an interest in the benefits of this covenant; *visible* holiness is all that can be demanded to give a title to the privileges of this covenant, so far as the administration of them is committed to men. Men cannot search the heart, and God never designed that the officers of his church should sit in judgment on the state of the heart. Acquaintance with the doctrines

* Ver. 1. † Amos iii. 3.

of revelation—a rational account of Christian experience—together with a correct and exemplary deportment—is all they have a right to demand. All such we are bound to receive; and so long as their conduct comports with their profession, we are bound to esteem them as true Christians, although, by the final decision of Him who will judge righteous judgment, they may be rejected as hypocrites and reprobates. But more of this hereafter. It answers our purpose, at present, to show that the openly wicked and profane can have no real interest in this covenant, and ought not to be suffered to enjoy any of its privileges; and that such as have had the seal of this covenant applied to them in infancy, if they refuse, as they grow up, to walk before God in holy obedience, are to be viewed as having violated the terms of the covenant, and are therefore, by discipline, to be excluded from those privileges to which they would otherwise have remained entitled. "To the wicked, God saith, what hast thou to do, that thou shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth?"* The term of the covenant is "Walk before me, and be thou perfect." This evidently makes it the duty of the church to demand *visible* holiness in adults, *to a formal admission into the covenant.* And as it is but reasonable, that the same exhibition of holiness should be made when the parent, in relation to the same rite, proposes to act for his child, that should be made when he acts for himself; it must further be the duty of the

*Ps. l. 16.

church to require *visible* holiness in parents, who present their children for the purpose of having them authoritatively sealed as members of the covenant.

3. A third fact asserted, in the account given by Moses of the Abrahamic covenant, is this—*In that covenant arrangements were contained for the organization and preservation of the visible church.*

In the statement, and elucidation of *this fact*, it is not designed to insinuate that there were no believers, nor ordinances of religious worship, before the time of Abraham. These certainly did exist. Abel, Enoch, Noah, and many others, who lived, and walked with God, before Abraham was born, will remain distinguished examples of piety to all succeeding believers. Sacrificial rites too, as ordinances of social worship, instituted and owned by God himself, were then solemnly observed. Moreover, there were "sons of God," distinct from the "daughters of men."* Also, "men then called upon the name of the Lord;"† and Noah officiated in his day, as a "preacher of righteousness."‡

All this is readily admitted; and not a few, whose judgment we are bound to respect, consider this sufficient evidence, that a visible church has existed since the days of Adam; and that the Abrahamic covenant only *improved* its organization.—To this sentiment we should cheerfully subscribe, were we able to discover, anterior to the time of Abraham, any arrangement, to characterize the body of pro-

* Gen. vi. 2. † Gen. iv. 26. ‡ 2 Pet. ii. 5.

fessors of the true religion (some of whom might be hypocrites,) as the church of God. For, in speaking of the visible church, we have reference not to the election of grace, known only to God, but to the body of professors. True, the organization of such a body is designed for the salvation of the elect only. The visible church is the repository of revealed truth, and the nursery for heaven. God there gathers to himself his chosen people. But it is equally true, that the visible church exists as distinguished from the chosen and believing people of God; and as we conceive, her existence commenced with the Abrahamic covenant. Then the visible church, as a distinct society, having its appropriate badge of membership, its laws of government, and its modes of worship—all, *important*, if not *essential*, to an ecclesiastical organization—made her appearance. Then an arrangement took place, under which thousands have been, and still are characterized as belonging to God's church, who never have tasted, and never will taste the power and the consolations of his grace. This is God's arrangement for the salvation of his people; and who shall ask him, "What doest thou? or why doest thou thus?"

By this covenant, Abraham, and his family, were constituted εκκλησια Θεου, *the church of Jehovah;* while circumcision was appointed as *the token of their membership.*

"And God said unto Abraham, thou shalt keep my covenant, therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee, in their generations. This is my covenant

which ye shall keep between me and you, and thy seed after thee: Every man-child among you shall be circumcised. And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you."*

Here we have the account of the visible organization of the church of God; embracing as its members the family of Abraham, whether male or female, whether adults or infants. But a question arises, How was the succession of church members to be kept up? It cannot be supposed, that God organized a church on earth, and then left her to die with her first members. We naturally look for some arrangement or provision for filling up the places of those, who were removed by death; and for perpetuating, and even enlarging his church on earth. This expectation is not disappointed.—In examining the covenant we find, that Abraham, by this interesting transaction, was constituted the father of all who believe in every age of the church; and that, by accessions from among adults, as well as by the birth of children within her pale, the church was to be perpetuated and enlarged. All such, at whatever period of the church they make their appearance, as her members, bear a special relation to Abraham, *as the father of the faithful.* This is evidently the import of the expression, "A father of many nations have I made thee."† Which cannot be understood of his *natural* seed; for numerous as was the posterity of Abraham, it never was true that

* Vers. 9, 10, 11. † Ver. 5.

he was, in this sense, a father of many nations. Call the descendants of Ishmael a distinct nation, and, if you please, the descendants of Esau another distinct nation, still you have, including the posterity of Jacob, but three nations; a number too small to justify the expression *many nations*. The Apostles, by their statements, and their practice, have given us the true meaning of this phraseology. They uniformly represent all believers as embraced in the covenant made with Abraham; and the members of every country and nation, who receive the truth, as the children of Abraham. Thus as the gospel of the kingdom spreads, and nation after nation submits to the authority of Jesus Christ, the word of promise receives farther exemplification, "A father of many nations have I made thee." Not only did the inspired teachers of Christianity declare to the believing Jews, who were natural descendants of Abraham; "Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, and in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed."* But the Apostle Paul, in his Epistles to the Romans and Galatians, employs a similar phraseology concerning converts from heathenism; and positively asserts that the provisions of the Abrahamic covenant extend to them, and that they too are the children of promise. To the believing Romans, he writes thus: "And he (i. e. Abraham) received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the

* Acts iii. 25.

faith which he had, yet being uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed to them also: And the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised. For the promise that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all; as it is written, I have made thee *a father of many nations*."* To the Galatians, he says, "Know ye therefore, that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham: That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles, through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."†

It is then perfectly evident, that in the covenant made with Abraham, we not only discover the *ori-*

* Rom. iv. 11, 12, 13, 16, 17. † Gal. iii. 7, 8, 9, 14, 29.

ginal organization of the visible church; but also, as expressive of the intention of the Head of the Church, the necessary arrangements and directions, to perpetuate both her *existence* and her *purity*. And it is as impossible that the church should become extinct or corrupt, while the plan laid down by Jehovah is faithfully adhered to, as it is to convict Him of weak design, or inefficient operation. All corruption in the church, in her government, her ordinances, and her worship, may be traced to human and impious interference with the plans of unerring Wisdom. And we care not whether the *professed object* in departing from the law of God's house be to meet the views and accommodate the wishes of corrupt and ungodly men, who cannot bear the restraints of God's covenant; or whether it be to deliver the church from all hypocrisy and false profession, and confine her limits to the company of true believers. We feel bound to bear our testimony against it; and to condemn it as unauthorized innovation, and bold presumption.

When the tabernacle was to be erected in the wilderness, the charge was imperative: "See that thou make all things according to the pattern showed to thee in the Mount."* The spirit of this direction is still in force. "In vain," said Christ,† "do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." Firm and faithful adherence to the principles of God's covenant, and the ordinances of his worship, is at once the interest

* Heb. viii. 5 † Mat. xv. 9.

and the glory of the church. If we lower the standard of covenant qualifications, and relax the discipline of God's house, we mar the beauty of the church—we dishonour her glorious Lord—and we profane his ordinances. And on the other hand, as has well been remarked, "to seek to be more pure than the rule, will ever end in impurity in the issue. God hath so framed his covenant, and consequently the constitution of his church thereby, as to design a continuation and propagation of his kingdom therein from one generation to another. Hence the covenant runs *to us, and to our seed after us, in their generations.* To keep in the line, and under the influence and efficacy of this covenant of God, is the true way to the church's glory."*

To conclude this article: The covenant made with Abraham, by declaring all believers, whether of the circumcision or the uncircumcision, children of Abraham, and heirs according to the promise, makes provision for the perpetuity of the church, and sustains its character as the *everlasting covenant.*†

4. The fourth and last fact suggested by an examination of the Abrahamic covenant is this: *The one‡ seal of church-membership was circumcision un-*

* Mather's Mag. Vol. ii. p. 251. † Gen. xvii. 13.

‡ *The one seal.* Whatever the covenant, made with Abraham, was designed to accomplish, was sealed by circumcision. Examine the covenant fifty times, and you will not find mention made of any other seal than circumcision. As for the Passover, it was not instituted until about four hundred years afterwards. And who will undertake to say, that the Abra-

der the law, which has been superseded by baptism under the gospel.

Both circumcision and the passover, as we have repeatedly stated, were sacraments of the covenant of grace, under the legal dispensation. Both baptism and the Lord's supper are sacraments, under the evangelical dispensation. But by that particular exhibition of the covenant of grace, called the Abrahamic covenant, circumcision was made the proper badge and token of membership. This was its *special use.**—The Jew, who was not circumcised, did

---

hamic covenant was not properly sealed until four hundred years of its existence had passed away? To say, that the covenant of grace had more than one sacramental seal, is saying nothing to the purpose. Every sacrifice was a sacrament; but not the appropriate sacrament and seal of the Abrahamic covenant. The Noaic covenant, too, was predicated on the covenant of grace. It was an exhibition of the covenant of grace securing the preservation of the earth, for the accomplishment of the work of the "Seed of the woman," in the salvation of the "election of grace." But the Noaic covenant, as such, never had any other sacramental seal than the rainbow. So with respect to the Abrahamic covenant, circumcision is its one seal; and as the organization and preservation of a visible church, for the transmission of saving blessings through this channel to the true Israel, the elect of God, was the great object contemplated in the Abrahamic covenant, membership in the visible church could then be properly and effectually sealed only by circumcision—the same which is now done by baptism.

* *This was its special use.* The sacrament of circumcision, in addition to its use, in common with the other sacraments, to seal an interest in "the righteousness of faith," and the benefits of the covenant of grace in general, was an *initiatory rite;* while the passover was a *commemorative and confirming ordi-*

not belong to the congregation of the Lord. The Jew, who was circumcised, needed no additional proof of his membership. Whatever further might be required from him *as a member*, and to *retain his standing as a member*, nothing further was necessary to *constitute him a member*.

"This is my covenant which ye shall keep between me and you, and thy seed after thee: Every man-child among you shall be circumcised. And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your fore-skin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you. And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every man-child in your generations; he that is born in the house, or bought with money of any stranger, which is not of thy seed. And the uncircumcised man-child, whose flesh of his fore-skin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people: he hath broken my covenant."*

By circumcision, therefore, as the divinely appointed token of the covenant, and badge of membership, the descendants of Abraham were to be distinguished. No one, whatever his piety might have been, could be acknowledged as a member of the visible church, unless circumcised. The recognition of a Jew, as a member of God's church, did

nance. The same is now true of baptism and the Lord's supper. The first puts upon the child of the covenant the badge of membership; the other nourishes him until he arrives at the stature of a perfect man in Christ Jesus, whose death it commemorates.

* Ver. 10, 11, 12, 14.

not depend on his eating the passover, any more than on his discharging any other duty or act of worship. True, as a member, bound to perform the duties of a member, he was required to eat the passover, under pain of church censure; but as for his membership, it had been sealed by a previous and different ceremony. Indeed, his right to the passover depended, among other things, on his having previously been sealed as a member of God's church. Even the membership of females was sealed by this ordinance. To them it could not be personally administered; but they were viewed as represented by the males, and as circumcised in them—daughters in their fathers, wives in their husbands. This is proved by the fact, that they were permitted to eat the passover, from which every uncircumcised person was excluded by express statute.* Maimonides† says, that women were not only admitted to the paschal feast, but that at times there was a company which consisted only of women. The visible church, from the time of Abraham to the commencement of the evangelical dispensation, consisted of *circumcised persons*. They, and they only, had the token of God's covenant upon them; and the authoritative assurance that they belonged to the holy society, which Jehovah had set apart for himself, and on which he was bestowing the blessings of salvation; not, indeed, on all, but on as many of them as he, in the exercise of his sovereign grace, should be pleased to select.

* Exo. xii. 48. † de Pasch. c. 2. § 5.

Baptism, as we have proved in our preceding letter, has now taken the place of circumcision; consequently, baptism is now the *one seal of the Abrahamic covenant.* It is only by baptism that any one can, under the gospel dispensation, be *formally declared to be within the church, and entitled to the privileges of visible membership.* No matter what a person's faith and piety may be; no matter how good his standing may be, as it respects the invisible church, and the eternal world; he is not to be acknowledged a member of the *visible* church, while the ordinance of baptism is neglected by him. "Persons (says a writer*) may be virtually in covenant by *their own* or their *parents* faith; but they are not *visibly* and *professedly* in covenant or in church, till they have passed under the appointed ceremony. When we speak of persons being admitted into the church by baptism, we mean not that this conveys the right of admission; for it presupposes the *right* and the *qualification* or *relation,* in which the right by divine institution is founded: but that it *declares* the right, and thus introduces to *visible* privileges. God says, "The uncircumcised man-child shall be cut off from among his people. he hath broken my covenant." He was previously in covenant else he could not be said to break it by his uncircumcision. So also the unbaptized person is to be cut off, or excluded from the privileges of the Christian church."

---

* Dr. Joseph Lathrop's Sermons on the mode and subjects of Christian baptism. p. 52, note.

The *visible Christian church* is, then, made up of *baptized persons.* Their baptism has sealed their membership; and until that membership has been destroyed by proper authority, their standing in the visible church, and their claim on the privileges of the visible church, are not to be controverted, especially when they furnish evidence that they are qualified to participate in such privileges. The practice of calling *communicants*, *members* in contradistinction from those who have been baptized, and not subsequently cut off, is altogether unjustifiable; and this wrong has been the source of many other wrongs. That every baptized person is bound, at a suitable period of life, to assume his baptismal engagements, and to obey the dying command of the Saviour, in the devout celebration of the supper, no one will deny. All that we contend for is, that his so doing does not form a *new relation*, but only completes the relation declared to exist at the time of his baptism. It is no more than an act of duty devolving on him, as a member of the church, by which he acknowledges his relation to the church, and personally takes hold of God's covenant. Going to the table of the Lord no more *makes* a man a member of the church, than praying to God in his family, or performing any other Christian duty, makes him a member. Whatever spiritual blessings are sealed to the believer in the sacrament of the supper, his relationship to the visible church is not so sealed: His right to approach the table of the Lord is, in part at least, a result of his membership,

sealed by a previous and different ordinance. Baptism, and baptism alone, is the seal and badge of membership; and membership can be taken away only by the destruction of this seal and badge. Even in the excommunication of professors of religion, the censure inflicted can have reference only to the relationship recognized in baptism. We thus guard against the profanation of sealing ordinances by declaring the membership, sealed in baptism, to have been forfeited. If this be not the fact—if excommunication only contemplates the sacrament of the supper—why do we exclude from baptism the children of excommunicated persons? Certainly excommunication breaks up the relation between the offender and the church: It declares him to be a heathen; it nullifies his baptism during the time of his excision, so far as it respects the distinguishing privileges to which members in good standing are entitled. If this be correct, there can be no necessity, nor propriety, in delaying church censures until a profession of religion has been made. The sentence of excommunication may, with as much propriety, be passed upon a baptized member as upon a communicant; and the necessity for it is of much more frequent occurrence, in most of our churches. These remarks are in this place, however, only brought forward as hints, naturally suggested by the view we have taken of the Abrahamic covenant. They will be resumed, and considered more in detail, in subsequent communications. At present, I conclude with transcribing three proposi-

tions of the excellent JONATHAN MITCHEL, one of the distinguished divines of the New England Church, in her puritan days. They have a bearing upon the subject we have considered; and present it in a plain, and, to me, satisfactory point of view. These are his propositions:

"First. The *whole visible church*, under the *New Testament*, is to be *baptized*.

"Secondly. If a man be one in the church (whether admitted at age or in infancy,) nothing less than censurable evil can put him out.

"Thirdly. If the *parent* be in the *visible church*, his *infant child* is so also."

These propositions are followed up by the remark, "*that all the baptized are, and ought to be under discipline in particular churches.*"*

* See Cotton Mather's Magnalia, vol. ii. p. 82. Hart. Ed. 1820.

LETTER V.

Baptism—Sign—Its import—How to be administered—Brief view of John's baptism.

BELOVED PEOPLE,

THUS far we have considered sacraments *in general*, with a special reference, however, to *baptism* and the *Lord's supper;* which, as was stated at the conclusion of my third letter, are designed for the use and benefit of the Christian Church, until the end of time. We have now arrived at a point when it becomes necessary to examine these ordinances *separately;* and to enquire into the *nature* of each—the *signs*, which are to be employed—the *benefits*, which are signified and sealed by them—the *subjects*, who are to participate in them—and the *solemn obligations*, which all who *vow* are under, to *pay to the Lord that which they have vowed.*

We begin with the sacrament of baptism. *It is an institution of the Lord Jesus Christ, in which, by the application of water in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, the subject is solemnly recognized, as a member of God's visible church, and is consecrated to the service of Jehovah, the God of salvation; with a direct reference to the justifying righteousness, and the sanctifying grace of the Lord Jesus, as signified and sealed in the ordinance.*

Water, "pure unmixed water," is the sign to be used in this ordinance. Nothing can be found in scripture to justify the use of oil, and other ingredients, employed by the Church of Rome, any more than the ceremonies which they practise, in the administration of baptism. The Apostles, and their fellow labourers in the gospel, used such water as could be most conveniently obtained, only attending to its *purity*, that it might be a fit emblem of *spiritual cleansing*. And such water, wherever it was found, they *used in the state in which they found it*, without any foreign admixtures. When the Ethiopean Eunuch had been instructed in the principles, and converted to the faith of the Christian religion by the instrumentality of Philip, "as they went on their way, they came to a certain water." Observe, it is not stated whether it was a living spring, a running stream, or a stagnant pond; for that was completely immaterial: "They came to a certain water; and the Eunuch said, See here is water, what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And he commanded the chariot to stand still; and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the Eunuch, and he baptized him."*

The *water*, thus used in baptism, is a *sign* of the *blood* and *grace* of the Lord Jesus; and the *application* of this water, in the administration of the

* Acts viii. 36—38.

ordinance, is a *sign* and *seal* of the *washing away of sin* by the *merit of that blood and the efficacy of that grace.* Nothing but the blood of Christ can cleanse us from our guilt, whether original or actual. No one but the Spirit of Christ can renew and sanctify our depraved hearts. And these are the benefits signified and sealed in this sacrament; viz. justification through the imputed righteousness, and sanctification by the invincible grace of the Son of God. For as water applied to the body cleanses it from natural impurities, so the blood and grace of Christ, applied to the soul, cleanse it from moral defilement.

How the water, used in the ordinance of baptism, is to be *applied*, has long been a subject of controversy; although to me it appears to be a subject of minor importance. Our "form" concedes that it may be used *by dipping in*, or *sprinkling with.* The application of water by authorized hands, in the name of the triune Jehovah, to a proper subject, is baptism. We, indeed, have our choice; and we have our reasons for it: although, upon the supposition that either *mode* will answer, it might be sufficient barely to say, that we prefer sprinkling on the ground of *convenience, of safety, and of decency.*

But perhaps the subject ought not to be dismissed in this summary manner. It is our duty, on all proper occasions, to assign the reasons of our *hope*, and of our *practice* too. And

1st, I observe, that it is utterly impossible to come to any positive conclusion as to the *manner* in

which baptism ought to be administered, from an examination of the original word Βαπτιζω, used in the New Testament, in relation to this ordinance. I avail myself of remarks made on this point by the late Rev. Samuel S. Smith, D.D. president of the College of New Jersey.* "I observe (says he,) that the term baptism, in the sacred writings, is applied indifferently, to signify either *partial* or *entire* washings—either *sprinkling* or *immersion*. It is unnecessary to recite all the passages, in which this is demonstrated. To one or two only I shall refer. "When Jesus went to eat with a certain Pharisee, the Pharisee *wondered that he had not first washed*," (Luke xi. 38.) referring to the Jewish custom of washing their hands before meat. But in the original, it is *he wondered that he had not first* [εβαπτισθη] *baptized*. "Many other things there be," says the evangelist Mark, (vii. 4.) "which they have received to hold, as the washing [in the original, the Βαπτισμους, *baptisms*,] of cups, of pots, of brazen vessels, and of tables." As the sacred writer, probably, refers to the instruments of the temple service, or to those domestic utensils, which were religiously purified according to the same forms, the whole Levitical ritual proves that these purifications were effected by various *sprinklings or aspersions*. See Lev. xiv. Num. viii. and xix. Heb. ix. 19, 20." The Apostle Paul, too, in his first Epistle to the Corinthians, x chap. 2nd verse, says that the children of Israel "were all baptized [εβαπτισαντο] unto Moses in the

* See Christian's Magazine, vol. ii. p. 54.

cloud, and in the sea." Now it is evident, that they were baptized in no other way than by being *sprinkled* with the spray, or drops, falling from the cloud.—But I need not enlarge. The attentive and critical reader well knows, that the original term means sprinkling as well as immersion. Paul, Heb. ix. 10, calls the Jewish purifications, which we know were generally performed by affusion or sprinkling, *divers washings*. In the original it is διαφοροις Βαπτισμοις.

2. It will occur to every reader, that in sacraments, it is an object of high importance, that there should be as strict a resemblance between the *sign* and the *thing signified* as the nature of the case admits of. We have before remarked, that the water in baptism ought to be *pure*, to make it a proper emblem of *spiritual cleansing*. We now assert, that the water used in baptism ought to be *applied in that way*, in which the *benefits signified by the water are said to be applied;* and in what way are those benefits said to be applied? By sprinkling. This is an important consideration; and to me it appears to possess more weight than any other that can be urged in relation to the subject in dispute. "In forming our judgment of the validity of the mode by aspersion (says the writer above referred to), it deserves to be particularly remarked, that *sprinkling* is, throughout the sacred writings, used as one of the most common and significant emblems of purity, of cleansing, of repentance—of every thing that is implied in the waters of baptism. Not to speak of the

innumerable aspersions used for this purpose under the Levitical law: The *blood of the atonement* is expressly called *the blood of sprinkling*, Heb. xii. 24. Isaiah, in announcing the office and the grace of the future Messiah, declares *he shall sprinkle many nations*, (lii. 15.) The prophet Ezekiel, in proclaiming the sanctifying influence of the gospel, does it by this figure: "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean," (xxxvi. 25.) And when the Apostle would express in the strongest terms that purity of mind which, in our approaches to God, we ought to bring with us to the throne of grace, he says Heb. x. 22, *Let us come to him having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience.*"

It is not necessary to multiply quotations, nor to comment on the passages cited in the foregoing extract: They speak for themselves; and with one accord declare, that the benefits signified and sealed in baptism, particularly justification, and sanctification, are in scripture spoken of under the idea of sprinkling; and that, therefore, baptism not only *may*, but *ought* to be administered, under the form of *sprinkling*.

3. A third consideration in favour of *baptism by sprinkling* relates to Apostolic practice.

In the second chapter of Acts, we are informed, that on the memorable day of Pentecost, when a glorious wave-offering, the first fruits of a more glorious harvest, was presented to the Lord, *three*

housand persons were converted, and by baptism added to the church. Now it is not to be believed, that all these were baptized by immersion: Nay, it was utterly impossible, that Peter, and all the assistants, of whose services he could avail himself, could *in that way* have baptized such a multitude in one day.

The case of Cornelius, the centurion, of whom we have an account in the xth chapter of Acts, is also in point. When, under the preaching of Peter, the Holy Ghost, in his miraculous gifts, as well as saving grace, fell upon Cornelius, and others assembled on the occasion, Peter said, "Can any man *forbid water* (intimating that the water had to be brought, and then applied,) that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?"

The baptism of the Jailor, related in the xvith chapter of Acts, is the last I shall notice to prove that the Apostles baptized by *sprinkling*. It was midnight when the foundations of the prison were shaken, by a great earthquake—when all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed,—at the dead hour of the night, and in the midst of all the confusion occasioned by the earthquake, &c. the trembling Jailor cried, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved? and they (Paul and Silas) said, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house; and

he took them, *the same hour of the night*, and washed their stripes; and was baptized he and his straightway."

Now, let who will believe, that the Jailor left the prison exposed at midnight, (the doors having just been thrown open, and the bands of the prisoners loosed,) and went to a place, convenient for administering baptism by immersion. To me it appears most evident, that the hour of the night, and the state of the prison, both forbad the Jailor's leaving the house; and that baptism was then, as it always ought to be, administered by sprinkling.

Indeed, I question very much whether the New Testament gives account of a single baptism administered by immersion, or employs a single expression which can, by fair inference, be made to sanction that mode? I know that this is to question what some assert to be as clear, as though it had been written with a sun-beam. But I am not to blame, for not being able to see with other men's eyes. I am, however, not unwilling to attend to what they have discovered, and to listen to what they have to say, in relation to this matter.

'The baptism of John, (say they) was administered by immersion; and this is evident from the circumstance, that he retired to *Enon, near Salim, because there was much water there.*' John iii. 23.

To this we reply, that as John's baptism preceded the introduction of the evangelical dispensation, it is not entitled to the high distinction of *gospel baptism*; neither can his practice be imposed on us as

a rule, by which we are to be regulated, in the administration of that ordinance. Very great, unquestionably, was the honour which the Master put upon the Baptist, by commissioning him to be his *forerunner*, to prepare his way—to announce his advent —and to point him out to the multitude, as *the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.** But the honour of a name, and a standing in the gospel church, was never conferred on this distinguished character. Such honour was expressly denied him by the Saviour, when he said, "Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist; notwithstanding, he that is least in the kingdom of heaven [i. e. gospel church] is greater than he."† The evangelical dispensation did not commence until the types had received their accomplishment, by the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Then the Redeemer exclaimed, with his expiring breath, *It is finished;* and then, too, *the vail of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom.* Both expressive of the fact, that then the ceremonial law had received its accomplishment, and answered its purpose; and that then the *new state of things*, or evangelical age, was to commence.

This fact suggests the propriety of enquiring into the *nature* and *object* of the baptism of John. Such enquiry will be of use, on more than one occasion, in the course of our remarks. And if we succeed in establishing our assertion, that the baptism of John

* Jo. i. 29. † Matt. xi. 11.

is not entitled to the distinction of gospel baptism, we shall have gained much in the controversy we are obliged to carry on with the Antipedobaptists, both in respect to the mode and the subjects of gospel baptism; inasmuch as all arguments drawn from the practice of the Baptist will then be considered as irrelevant and inadmissible. We then venture to assert, that John's baptism was no more than *a ceremonial washing;* the object of which was, the *purification of the people preparatory to the coming of Messiah.* That such purification was common among the Jews in view of some interesting solemnity, no reader of the Bible will undertake to question. Before the giving of the law at Mount Sinai *the people were commanded to sanctify themselves, and to wash their clothes.** When Jacob had been reminded of his unfaithfulness in relation to the vow he had made at Bethel, he "said unto his household, and to all that were with him: Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments: and let us arise and go up to Bethel; and I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went."† The Jews say, that in both these instances the meaning was, that they should *wash, or be baptized.* "And as these washings were intended not only for the purifying of the flesh, but to be signs and symbols of moral purity; so the rite of baptism was, in this view, very suitable to the doctrine of repentance

* Exo. xix. 10, 14.

† Gen. xxxv. 2, 3.

which John preached. It was a rite appertaining exclusively to the legal economy, instituted for the use of the Jews alone, for a short time, to prepare them for the kingdom of Messiah then approaching, by an extraordinary, general purification, attended with suitable instructions and exhortations to the people."* Agreeably to this, a Rabbi, in commenting upon Zech. ix. 6, gives this meaning: "And Elias came to distinguish the unclean, and to purify them."† The business of Elias (that is of John the Baptist,) was then to purify the nation, by a ceremonial washing, and to prepare them for the reception of the Messiah; an event important in itself, and long expected and desired by the Jews. This appears to have been the grand design of John's ministry and baptism, "to make ready a people prepared to receive the Lord Jesus in his personal ministry."—This view of John's baptism, as *a ceremonial purification*, is supported by the phraseology of the Evangelist John.‡ "Then there arose a question between some of John's disciples and the Jews about *purifying*. And they came unto John, and said unto him, Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou bearest witness, behold the same *baptizeth*, and all men come to him." It is very evident from these words, that the baptism spoken of in the 26th verse, was the subject of dispute, and was the question about *purifying* stated in the 25th verse.

* Evang. Guard. vol. ii. p. 16. † P. 18.
‡ Chap. iii. 25, 26.

Further; that the baptism of John was not esteemed gospel baptism by the Apostles, we think evident from the conduct of both Peter and Paul. It is hardly to be supposed, considering what multitudes had been baptized by John, that a company of three thousand could be collected in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem without embracing more or fewer who had been baptized by John. It is not to be supposed, that from among a promiscuous assembly three thousand should be made the subjects of grace, without including some, yea many, who had been baptized by John; yet no exception in favour of such is stated in the history of that memorable day. And all this was perfectly proper, upon the supposition which we have endeavoured to establish; viz. that John's baptism was not gospel baptism. It gives no countenance for a reapplication of gospel baptism: It does not favour the cause of the Anabaptist, nor weaken the hands of the Pedobaptist.

The case recorded in the xixth chapter of Acts, although the true meaning of that narrative is a matter of controversy between respectable critics, we consider as furnishing additional evidence of the fact, that John's baptism was not gospel baptism; and that, therefore, those who had been baptized by John had to be inducted into the gospel church, by submitting to a subsequent and Christian baptism. "And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain dis-

ciples, he said unto them, have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, we have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. And he said unto them, unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, unto John's baptism. Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on him which should come after him—that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus." 1—5.

The whole difficulty, the reader will perceive, in regard to this narrative, lies in ascertaining to whom the remark in the 5th verse is to be attributed. Is it Paul, or is it the writer of the Acts, who observes "When they heard this?" If Paul, then the meaning is, that John told his hearers, before he baptized them, that they should believe in the Messiah, about to be manifested; and that understanding this, they were baptized by him in the name of the Lord Jesus. This may be true; but I cannot discover any force or propriety in the whole passage under this construction. Further; as we have no evidence that John used *the name of the Lord Jesus* in the administration of his baptism, I greatly question whether the above construction, should it be admitted, will justify the expression that *they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus?* All this, on the other hand, is perfectly clear; and the whole passage, divested of ambiguity, assumes the character of a plain narrative, if the remark, "and when they heard

this," be considered as the remark of Luke, the historian. This construction, supported by many writers,* appears to me most decidedly preferable to the other; and if this be admitted, it will follow, as a matter of course, that the Apostles baptized persons, who had been baptized by John; which they certainly would not have done, if John's baptism had been gospel baptism.

But to return to the objection under consideration. If it were not the fact, that John's baptism was not gospel baptism, his going to Enon would not prove that he baptized by immersion. It must be remembered, that water is an extremely scarce and valuable article in the country where John exercised his ministry. Also that, upon the supposition that he baptized by sprinkling, very considerable water would be necessary *to baptize* the vast multitudes who resorted to him,† as well as for *the ordinary consumption* of all who waited on his ministry; many of whom, no doubt, tarried for days, perhaps for weeks. It was, therefore, a most convenient and judicious arrangement for John to locate himself in a part of the country, where he not only could find water for the purpose of baptizing, but where the people could procure a necessary supply of that useful article for ordinary purposes. Enon was a place [ὕδατα πολλα] of *springs and rivulets;* and as *Dr. Lightfoot* has justly remarked, the expression

* Scott's Com. Dr. Janeway, Letters on the Abrahamic Covenant.

† Mark i. 5.

"much water" might, with equal propriety, have been rendered "many waters,"—that is, a number of *springs or small brooks:* none of which, notwithstanding all the noise about *much water*, probably furnished the necessary quantity of water for the purpose of immersion. Certain it is, if travellers who have visited the place make a correct report, our modern advocates for immersion would, upon being brought to the spot, be exceedingly puzzled to point out a sufficiency of water in one place to answer their purpose. The country must have greatly changed, indeed, since the days of John, (and of this no evidence remains,) if he could find at Enon water enough to have answered *his purpose*, upon the supposition that he baptized by immersion.

Again: it is alledged by those who differ from us, as to the *mode* of baptism, that Scripture in giving an account of certain baptisms, states that the subjects *went down into the water and came up out of the water.* This, say they, is particularly affirmed concerning the Eunuch whom Philip baptized, (Acts, viii.) to which we reply: it is indeed affirmed concerning the Eunuch that he went down into the water, and more than this is affirmed; it is affirmed *that they went down both of them into the water, both Philip and the Eunuch.* Now unless the advocates for immersion will concede that Philip went under the water—was immersed; the phraseology of this passage can avail them nothing; for the same expression is used in relation to the person baptizing,

and the person baptized, they went down both into the water, both Philip and the Eunuch.

This, however, was not the *baptismal act; going into the water was not baptizing*; for after the historian had stated that they went down both into the water, he adds, "and he baptized him." How the ordinance was administered the inspired writer has not told us. This we are therefore left to gather from the circumstances of the case; and from what in Scripture appears to have been the uniform practice of the Apostles.

The plain, common sense interpretation of this passage undoubtedly is this; Philip and the now believing Eunuch, having come to water, and not being furnished with a vessel for dipping water, it was necessary for them to walk down to, and perhaps to step in the water, (which would unhesitatingly be done in that warm climate, where men go barefooted, or only shod with sandals,) so that Philip might conveniently dip water with his hand, and apply it to the Eunuch. The fact, as critics well know, and has often been stated on this very point; the fact is, that the prepositions εἰς and ἐκ, translated *into* and *out of*, might as well have been translated *to* and *from*; so they are translated in many other parts of the New Testament, and especially in the writings of Luke. The translation of a preposition, and that a preposition of doubtful and various significations, may indeed sometimes throw light upon a subject, but can never decide a controversy.

But we have another difficulty: It relates to the

quantity of *water* at the place where the Eunuch was baptized. This must have been considerable, upon the supposition that he was immersed; but of this there is no evidence. GUISE, in his paraphrase of the passage has the following note, which I presume my readers will consider satisfactory; at least, until counter testimony as to the fact involved, is produced. "Τι υδωρ, a *certain water*, seems to be of *diminutive* signification, and to intimate that it was not water of any depth; and JEROME, SANDYS, and other travellers, speak of it as a certain spring or fountain, that rises at the foot of a mountain in the tribe of Judah or Benjamin, whose waters are sucked in by the same ground that produces them: and they report that this was the place where the Eunuch was baptized by Philip.*

Finally, the opposers of baptism by sprinkling, tell us that baptism is in Col. ii. 12, spoken of as *a being buried with Christ*, and that therefore the subject of this ordinance ought to be immersed or buried under the water.

I deny that this refers to water baptism; and call on the affirmer to make good his assertion. I open my Bible, and read the passage in connexion with the preceding verse: "In whom also ye are circumcised, with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the

* Vid. Hieron de locis Hebr page 41, and Sandy's Travels, lib. II. page 142.

faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead."

Now, here we have an account of "a *circumcision* made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ,"—that is, we have an account of the *circumcision of the heart.* We have also an account of a *baptism*, in which the subject is *buried with Christ*, and also *raised with him through the faith of the operation of God*,—that is, we have an account of the *baptism of the heart.*

The latter expression has no more to do with the waters of baptism, than the former has to do with the knife of circumcision; and it would be just as logical and just as scriptural to say, as the Church of Rome does, that we ought, in baptism, to mark the subject with the *cross*, because regeneration and sanctification are in scripture spoken of as a *being crucified with Christ.*

"The evident design of the 12th verse (as Dr. Parish remarks) is to illustrate the preceding verse, which speaks of spiritual circumcision made without hands. This *baptism* is that by which we are *raised with Christ;* but in water baptism we are not always raised with Christ. If men are plunged, they may generally be raised from the water; but this has no necessary connexion with "rising with Christ." This baptism is also effected *through faith, which is the operation of God;* but a man may be raised out of an ocean of water every day of his life,

and remain destitute of faith. Therefore the text has no reference to water baptism."

We therefore, upon a review of the whole ground, conclude, that baptism may be properly and validly administered by *sprinkling;* nay, that *sprinkling* is the mode supported by *scripture phraseology and Apostolic practice.*

LETTER VI.

Subjects of Baptism—Adult believers, and their children.

BELOVED PEOPLE,

We have ascertained, I trust, to your satisfaction, in what *manner* the water used in baptism is to be applied. Our next enquiry naturally is, *to whom is this ordinance to be administered?* To answer this question, it is necessary to recur to what has already been said concerning the nature and design of this institution. Baptism was appointed by Jesus Christ to be, under the new dispensation, the visible seal and token, of an interest in God's covenant, as circumcision was under the old. This being the fact, it follows, as a matter of course, that this seal of the covenant can, in truth, be administered only to such as are embraced in the terms and provisions of the

covenant. The badge of church-membership can, with propriety, be put only upon such as are members of the church. To baptize a person, is not to *make* him a member; but to recognize his *previous membership*. It is a public declaration, that the person so baptized is a member of the church of God, as visibly organized in the family of Abraham. This sentiment is found in our *form for the administration of baptism to infants;* "and therefore, as members of the church, ought to be baptized." To baptize any others, would be to mis-apply and profane a sacrament—to alienate a privilege, which God has ceded only to his church—and to seal a palpable falsehood.

The great question, then, to be resolved, is this: *Who are members of the church; and in what way is this distinction acquired?* This is certainly a question of primary importance; and we design to bestow upon it a suitable degree of attention.

In our examination of the Abrahamic covenant, we ascertained that the church, as *visibly organized*, in the family of that distinguished patriarch, embraced believing adults, together with their infant offspring. Not only the natural seed, but all under the care and government of Abraham, *whether born in his house, or bought with money;* for of all such he was the moral parent.* "In the self-same day was Abraham circumcised, and Ishmael, his son. And all the men of his house, born in the house, and

---

See Gen. xvii. 12, 13.

bought with money of the stranger, were circumcised with him."*

But further than this; we ascertained in our investigation of the Abrahamic covenant, that it makes provision for a succession of church members; and for the maintainance, until the end of time, of a visible church on earth, to serve as a channel for the transmission of revealed truth, and as a nursery to the church invisible. It was not the design of Jehovah, as we have already remarked, that the church on earth should die with her first members. Eternal truth has declared, that "the gates of hell shall not prevail against her."† In spite of all opposition, she shall live and prosper, until *all the glorious things spoken of Zion, the city of our God*, shall be accomplished, and the last redeemed soul be brought home to glory.

Two ways are pointed out, in the covenant made with Abraham, in which the succession of church-members, and the enlargement of the church, are to be secured.

1. *By accessions from among adults, previously without the pale of God's church and covenant.* It is one of the laws of God's house, that all who embrace the truths of his word, and make a credible profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, be admitted as members of his church. No matter what their former character may have been,—no matter whether they before were Jews, Mahometans, Pagans, or infidels. Such *strangers to the covenant of*

* Vers. 26, 27. † Mat. xvi. 18.

promise are to be admitted in the way of *original connexion*, whenever they embrace the religion of the Bible, and make a credible profession of faith in the Son of God, and of subjection to his divine authority.

I say a *credible profession of faith*, &c. For the Lord of the Church has adapted her government, and her terms of admission, to the capacities of men, constituted by his own authority *office-bearers in his house.* They cannot search the heart, and they are not required to do it. True; the applicant for church fellowship, in addition to acquaintance with the doctrines of revelation, and a strictly moral deportment, ought to be able to give a rational account of Christian experience. Any examination, which should rest *entirely* on the knowledge and the morals of the applicant, would certainly be very defective; and defective in the most important point. We well know that the most correct and extensive acquaintance with the system of revealed religion, even when such acquaintance with the truth is connected with the most unexceptionable deportment, will not bring a sinner to glory. The sinner, in order to be saved, must be "justified and sanctified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." The truths of God's word must revolutionize his soul—must teach him that he is a sinner, condemned and helpless,—must bring him to the foot of the cross,—must make him anxious for *mercy to pardon* him; and equally anxious *for grace to help him in every time of need.* In one word;

this applicant, to meet the Divine approbation, and to be accepted as a member of the *invisible* church, must be *a new creature in Christ Jesus, created unto good works.*

Of this, he is to be apprized. In relation to this, he is to be questioned. And unless he can give a rational account of Christian experience; of the operations of Divine grace, on his *understanding*, his *heart*, and his *practice*, the door of church-fellowship is not to be opened for his admission. For while nothing short of true faith, and vital piety, can give a right to sealing ordinances *in foro Dei, before God*; nothing short of the *evidence* of true faith and vital piety can give a right to sealing ordinances, *in foro ecclesiæ, before the Church.*

But after all, we are liable to be deceived and imposed on. This is not our fault; neither is it contrary to the intention of the Head of the Church. He who *makes the wrath of man to praise him, and who restrains the remainder of wrath*, works out his designs, in part, by allowing to hypocrites and deceivers a place in his visible church. To answer an important end, Judas was included among the twelve. For some wise design Simon Magus was permitted to enter the church, and receive the sacrament of baptism. It is the will of the Lord of the harvest, that the tares shall mingle with the wheat, until the gathering of the harvest, when a perfect and final separation shall take place.* God alone can search the heart; and the constitution of the

* Mat. xiii. 28—30.

visible church never contemplated *real* religion, as a term of fellowship. Every attempt to make the *visible* church *perfect*, by confining her limits to true believers, has proved as ineffectual as it has been presumptuous and unscriptural. The idea of a *perfect visible church* is not to be found in the Bible; and whenever it has lodged itself in the brains of enthusiasts, who happened to have influence, it has been productive of the most unpleasant consequences. This idea of a perfect church lies at the foundation of the Baptist error; and, as all acquainted with the history of the church, well know, produced the greatest disorder and excesses at the time of the Reformation, when the Menonites, or Anabaptists, as they were called, first made their appearance in Germany.*

I therefore repeat it; the *evidence* of *real* religion is all that is, or can be demanded, in the admission of adults to the fellowship of the church. The man, who is acquainted with the doctrines of revelation, who furnishes reason to believe that these

* The Menonites or Anabaptists, of the sixteenth century, were probably the offspring of the Petrobrussians; a small branch of the Waldenses, who, in the twelfth century, denied the propriety of infant baptism, because they contended that infants could not be saved; and who were the first that presented any thing like *combined* opposition to the doctrine of infant baptism, since the commencement of the Christian era. Dr. Robertson, in his history of Charles V. (see vol. ii. p. 295 et seq. Phil. Ed. 1812.) gives an affecting account of the extravagance and wickedness of the Anabaptists, in the sixteenth century. See also Mosheim's Eccles. History, vol. iv. p. 484 et seq. Phil. Ed. 1798.

doctrines have operated on his experience; who professes faith in the Lord Jesus, and supports that profession by a constant and exemplary discharge of the duties imposed by Christianity, is unquestionably to be received as a member of God's visible church, even though his heart should be as corrupt and unholy, as that of Judas Iscariot, or Simon Magus.

The person thus received, on his own confession of faith, as a member of the church, is to have his membership confirmed and sealed by the ordinance of baptism. Having been admitted into God's visible church, the token of the covenant is to be put upon him; and he is to wear the badge of Abraham's seed in its evangelical form. Abraham "received circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had, yet being uncircumcised."* And when those who were aliens before, give evidence that they are partakers of Abraham's faith, they become entitled to the *distinction* of Abraham's children.

Upon this principle the Jews proceeded, in relation to the surrounding heathen. When any one embraced the faith of the Jews, he was received into their communion; and his admission was recognized in the ordinance of circumcision. Upon this principle the church has proceeded in every age. Upon this principle we proceed in our day. Such as have not been baptized in infancy, and who consequently have not the covenant token of relationship to the church, must not be received and bap-

* Rom. iv. 11.

tized as members, until they give evidence of "repentance towards God, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ."

The *words of the institution of baptism* clearly specify that this is the course to be pursued in relation to unbaptized adults. "Go ye and teach all nations, baptizing them," &c. According to the tenor of this commission Peter acted on the day of Pentecost—"Repent, and be baptized." So also Philip, in the case of the Eunuch—"If thou believest, thou mayest." Adults must be *taught*, they must hopefully *repent* and *believe* before they are baptized. "It is not lawful (says our *form, for the administration of baptism to adult persons*,) to baptize those who are come to years of discretion, except they first be sensible of their sins, and make confession both of their repentance and faith in Christ." And again: "It is not lawful now-a-days to baptize any other adult persons, than such as have been taught the mystery of holy baptism by the preaching of the gospel, and are able to give an account of their faith, by the confession of the mouth."

All who thus give evidence of having been called by the word and Spirit of God, though they were *afar off*, and unrelated to the church before, must be acknowledged and baptized as her visible members.

This is the first way in which the church is to be perpetuated and extended—viz. by accessions from among those who before were not related to her; and who, in the way of original connexion, have come to own her covenant and her God.

2. A second way, in which the church on earth is to be preserved and enlarged, *is by the birth of children within her pale.* "The relations and benefits of the covenant (it has been justly remarked,) are the birth-right of parents, who are themselves of *the seed.*" Thus runs the promise—"I will establish my covenant between me and thee, *and thy seed after thee in their generations, for an everlasting covenant; to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.*"* The covenant, as we have already seen,† was not only established with Abraham, and his immediate seed; it embraced his posterity: not his natural, but his spiritual seed in their successive generations, for an everlasting covenant.

According to this *constitution*, it is a standing law, that if the parents are members of the visible church; yea, if but one of the parents be a member of the visible church, in good standing, the child is born within the church. Matthew Henry remarks: "The King of England would give those small thanks who should cut off all the children of the kingdom. Our law calls natural allegiance, *high allegiance*; and he that oweth it, is called *subditus natus, natural liege subject.* It is the privilege of the subject, and the prerogative of the King, that it should be so."

This is manifestly the doctrine of the Apostle Paul. "For the unbelieving husband (says he,)‡ is sanctified by the wife; and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; else were your children

* Gen. xvii. 7. † Letter iv. ‡ 1 Cor. vii. 14.

unclean, but now they are holy." You must be sensible, that the term *holy*, as here used by the Apostle, does not mean *real* or *internal holiness:* For the children of the most godly parents are, by nature, as depraved and unholy as the children of the most abandoned and profane; although, in consequence of pious counsel and example, they may be kept back from making such an awful exhibition of it. They are *children of wrath, even as others;* dead in law, and dead in sin. What the Apostle means is *federal holiness;* or an interest in the provisions and benefits of the covenant made with Abraham, by which the church was visibly constituted. The remark of Tertullian on the passage is this: "If either parent were Christian, the children were enrolled in Jesus Christ, by early baptism;" and it fairly implies infant baptism in the days of Paul.

Our *form, for the administration of baptism to infants*, uses a similar expression to denote the same truth: "*They are sanctified in Christ; and therefore, as members of his church, ought to be baptized.*"

Here we have two important ideas.

1. Children being *sanctified*, or, as the Apostle has it, *being holy*, means that they are, by birth, members of the visible church, as embraced in the covenant made with Abraham.

2. That none but such as are, by birth, members of the church, ought to be baptized.

These are ideas worthy of your serious consideration: Ideas, supported both by *scripture* and the *form* used by us, when we administer baptism to in-

fants. And yet, you cannot be ignorant of the fact, that, not a few among us, who are *unwilling to acknowledge themselves members of the church*, who, when spoken to on the subject, openly and unhesitatingly declare, that *they are not;* nevertheless wish to have their children baptized. Now, if the parent be not a member of the church, how can the child be a member? And, if the child be not a member, how can the seal of membership be applied to it?

But more of this hereafter. We are treading on disputed ground. And until we have ascertained more fully, that it is the will of God that the sacrament of baptism shall be administered to *some children*, it is needless to spend our time in enquiring *what description of children* are entitled to that ordinance.—The proof of the doctrine of infant baptism will be presented for your consideration in my next letter.

LETTER VII.

The right of infants to baptism proved, from the covenant made with Abraham—Their capacity to partake of spiritual blessings—The practice of the Apostles, and the history of the church.

BELOVED PEOPLE,

In my preceding paper, I maintained that *adult professing believers*, and *children born of parents, one or both in visible membership with the church*, are to be recognized as embraced in God's covenant; and are therefore entitled to baptism, as the seal of that covenant. This position, so far as it relates to adults, will not be controverted; but, so far as it respects the membership and baptism of infants, it has to fight its way through furious opposition, and must depend for its success on *the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.* "To the law and the testimony: If they speak not according to this word it is because there is no light in them."

I shall therefore, as I gave you reason to expect, at the conclusion of my last letter, now undertake to establish the fact, that children have a right to the ordinance of baptism; leaving it as the subject of some subsequent paper to determine more particularly *whose children* are entitled to this high distinction?

And I wish you distinctly to understand, that the question, now to be considered, is not whether *all* infants have a right to baptism? This, no one, so far as I know, contends for. The children of Jews, Pagans, Mahometans, &c. while the parents continue such, have manifestly no title to this holy institution. The simple question now before us is this: *Have any children whatever* a right to the ordinance of baptism? On this question, we take the affirmative; and rest our cause on the following considerations.

1. We contend, that *children have a right to the ordinance of baptism, in virtue of the covenant made with Abraham, the father of the faithful.* This is the first argument suggested in our Heidelbergh Catechism (section 27,) in support of infant baptism. "They, as well as adults, are included in the covenant and church of God."

Of the covenant made with Abraham, and in him, with the church, and of the interest of the "infant seed" in that covenant, we have a full and distinct account in the xviith chapter of Genesis, as we noticed in our ivth letter.

To refresh your memories, and place this argument in its full force before you, we will repeat so much of that interesting chapter as has immediate bearing on the point now under consideration. "And I will establish my covenant between me and thee, and thy seed after thee, in their generations, for an everlasting covenant; to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.——Thou shalt keep my

covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee, in their generations. This is my covenant, which ye shall keep between me and you, and thy seed after thee: Every man-child among you shall be circumcised. And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you. And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you; every man-child in your generations: He that is born in the house, or bought with money of any stranger, which is not of thy seed. He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised. And my covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. And the uncircumcised man-child, whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people: he hath broken my covenant." 7—14.

Here the interest of infants in the covenant, made with Abraham, and in the church, established in his family, is unequivocally asserted; and the badge of church-membership expressly enjoined to be put upon them, by divine command. Here the right of infants to the *seal* of the covenant, because they are *embraced* in that covenant, is, by the declaration of scripture, rendered incontrovertible.

Intelligent Baptists will not undertake to deny this. They themselves must acknowledge, that, under the old testament dispensation, God invested children with the privilege of church-membership; and directed that this privilege should be sealed to them by the ordinance of circumcision.

This right of infants to the seal of the covenant, which Baptists must acknowledge to have been valid under the old testament dispensation, we contend must continue valid, *unless the covenant made with Abraham, securing to children that right, has been abrogated: or unless the church, under the gospel dispensation, be a different church from that among the Jews.* Both these suppositions will, upon examination, be found to be unscriptural.

1. *The covenant made with Abraham, investing children with the right of church-membership, has not been abrogated.* This is evident from the words of Peter on the day of Pentecost. On that auspicious, eventful day, being the very commencement of the gospel dispensation, that Apostle recognized the Abrahamic covenant as in full force and operation; and, addressing the converts, recited to them a part of that gracious transaction. "The promise is to you, and your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call:"* That is, 'As in the days of Abraham, so now, God is the covenant God of believers, and also of their children; and that not only among the Jews, but also among the Gentiles: Such as *are now afar off;* sinners, not of the Jews, but of the Gentiles—"even as many as the Lord our God shall call." These all, when called, shall be acknowledged, *with their children,* as the special property of the Most High, and the spiritual descendants of faithful Abraham.'

* Acts ii. 39.

This covenant is, then, still in force. And now, we ask, how the right of infants to the seal of membership has been extinguished? The privilege of church-membership was originally conferred on children, by the Great Head of the Church. He alone, therefore, has authority to abrogate that right. And we now call for the evidence of such abrogation of privilege. We now ask for *positive command*, so confidently spoken of in this controversy? We ask for a *thus saith the Lord?* When or where was the right of children to a place in the church and covenant of God taken away? Where is the *countermand* recorded? On what page of the Bible is it to be found? Let us be convinced of this: Let us hear God saying in his word—'Infants are no longer members of my church: I revoke the privilege which I conferred upon them in the days of Abraham." Let us hear this, and we have done.

We drop the weapons, and leave the field of controversy: or, rather, we unite our force, with that of the opposers of infant baptism, and arm ourselves for the exclusion of infants, from a privilege to which they are no longer entitled.

But, reader, depend upon it, it is impossible to find such a *countermand*. God has never abrogated the church-membership of infants. They are still members of the church; and *must be members of the gospel church, unless the gospel church be a different church from that among the Jews?*

2. This is the second supposition we have stated;

and this, upon investigation, will be found to be as *erroneous* as the former.

That the church is now under a different dispensation,—that she has undergone a change, as it respects the forms and ordinances of worship,—is acknowledged by all. But change of dispensation, and of the externals of religion, cannot effect the existence of the church, nor destroy her identity? The church is *one;* and remains essentially the same, under every dispensation. This is the doctrine of Paul, in the xith chapter of his Epistle to the Romans; where he tells us, that the unbelieving Jews, as unfruitful branches, were broken off; and that the believing Gentiles were *grafted into the same stock*, from which these Jews had been broken off. Yea; he further asserts, that the Jews themselves will, at some future day, be grafted in again into their own olive tree: that is, they will belong to the very same church, from which they were formerly ejected. The gospel church, and the Jewish church, according to this statement of the Apostle, must be essentially one and the same church, built, as he elsewhere expresses it, "upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone."*

To conclude this argument: The covenant made with Abraham, by which children are invested with the right of church-membership, is to this day in force; and the church is essentially the same now

* Eph. ii. 20.

as in the days of Abraham. The right of infants must, of course, remain the same. They are members of the covenant and church of God; and have been so acknowledged by Jehovah himself, ever since the days of Abraham. Enumerating some of the benefits of the new economy, God says, by the prophet Isaiah, that his people "shall not labour in vain, nor bring forth for trouble; for they are the seed of the blessed of the Lord, and their *offspring with them*."* And in the prophecies of Joel,† "the infant, not yet weaned," is expressly mentioned, as belonging to "the congregation of the Lord." In full accordance with this, our Saviour, while on earth, said—"Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of God. And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them."‡

This standing of children "in the kingdom of God," or gospel church, as visibly related to the God of the covenant, can (seeing circumcision has been done away,) now be sealed only by the ordinance of baptism. It follows then, most clearly, that children must be baptized.

Reader, I speak not in the language of invective, when I say that, upon a review of this first argument, I tremble for those who debar infants from a privilege with which God has invested them; and unreasonably contend, that, under the mild and beneficent dispensation of the gospel, privileges have been ta-

---

* lxv. 23. † ii. 16. ‡ Mark x. 14, 16

ken away, which were enjoyed under the comparatively dark and oppressive dispensation of the law. O! that God would cause his people to see eye to eye, and by his Holy Spirit lead them into all truth!

2. My second argument in favour of infant baptism, respects the *capacity* of children to partake of the blessing signified and sealed in the ordinance of baptism; viz. *remission of sin through the blood of Christ, and sanctification through the influence of the Holy Ghost.*

That it is *possible* for infants to be in a state of favour with God, and, dying in infancy, to be saved from the wrath to come, the opposers of infant baptism will not deny. A very large majority of them would, probably, notwithstanding no explicit declaration upon the subject is recorded in the Bible, join in expressing a hope, that children, dying in infancy, are happy. But, if such children are saved, it cannot be on the ground of their personal innocence; for they are both *guilty* and *depraved*, as the children of fallen Adam. They can be saved only in that *one way*, which the gospel points out—the mediation, the righteousness, and grace of the Lord Jesus. Children, then, are *capable* of an interest in the blessings which Christ has purchased, and which baptism signifies and seals. Yea; we positively know, that, in some instances, children are actually partakers of these blessings, as it is evident from the case of Jeremiah, as well as that of John the Baptist. See Jer. i. 5, and Luke i. 15.

If then children may be, and sometimes actually are, partakers of the benefits signified and sealed in the ordinance of baptism, where can be the impropriety of administering to them the *sign* of these benefits? Especially since the promise, as recited by Peter on the day of Pentecost, *is to us, and to our children?* To this, the pious and learned authors of our Heidelbergh Catechism allude, when, in the section already referred to, they say, in support of infant baptism, that "redemption from sin by the blood of Christ, and the Holy Ghost, the author of faith, is promised to them no less than to the adult."

This argument, which is certainly not destitute of weight, contains in it, as you will hardly fail to notice, a satisfactory reply to the reproachful, indecent, and, I may add, without being uncharitable, impious remark: 'You might as well sprinkle your calves and your pigs! Our calves and our pigs have no souls: But our children have; and souls, too, that may be saved through our Lord Jesus Christ! And if Baptists wish to rank their children with brutes, we can only regret the circumstance, and express our dissent.

3. Our third argument in favour of infant baptism contemplates the practice of the Apostles. Apostolic example must be received as law, and submitted to as a decision from which there is no appeal; and we claim the practice of the Apostles in support of our own.

That the Apostles baptized whole families, is so plainly stated in scripture as not to admit a doubt.

Of such families, baptized by the Apostles, three are mentioned in the New Testament; viz. the family of Lydia, Acts xvi. 15; the family of the Jailor, Acts xvi. 33; and the household of Stephanas, 1 Cor. i. 16. To these we might add, with propriety, although the inspired statement is not so explicit, the family of Cornelius, the centurion, Acts x. 48; and the family of Crispus, Acts xviii. 8. This would increase the number to five.

Now the probability, that there were children in one of these families, is, at least, as fifteen is to one; and if there was but one child in one of these families, and that child was baptized in virtue of the promise, "I will be a God unto thee, and thy seed after thee," it is sufficient to establish the fact, that infants are proper subjects of gospel baptism.

It may not be improper in concluding this argument, drawn from Apostolic practice, to state a circumstance in relation to the baptism of Lydia's family. The Syriac translation of the New Testament was made not more than a hundred years after the crucifixion: The authors of it must, therefore, have been pretty correctly informed on the subject of Apostolic practice. That translation, in relating the baptism of Lydia, says, "And when she was baptized, and the children of her household." I do not mean to say, that this is a correct translation. I only mention it as an historical fact, throwing light upon the subject under consideration. And, I ask, how, if infant baptism had never been heard of in that day, as our opponents assert, how it entered the

heads of these translators to say, that the children of Lydia were baptized with her?

But of proof like this, I might furnish abundance. The history of the church, as well as the practice of the Apostles, is most decidedly in our favour.

4. Let us then, as containing a fourth argument in favour of infant baptism, turn our attention *to the history of the church.* Ireneus, who was instructed by Polycarp, the disciple of the Apostle John, declares expressly *that the church learned from the Apostles to baptize children.* Origen, in the third century, affirmed, *that the custom of baptizing infants was received from Christ and his Apostles.* In the same century, and in the days of the famous Cyprian of Carthage, a council of sixty-six pastors was held to decide, whether it was necessary that infants should be baptized on the eighth day, as that had been the day for circumcising the Jewish children? or whether some other, and more convenient time, would answer the same purpose? No one asked, whether infants should be baptized at all? That was universally acknowledged. The only doubt entertained in relation to the subject, respected the particular time for the administration of the ordinance. On this point, the council decided, "that an infant might be baptized on the second or third day, or at any time, after its birth."

In the fourth century, Chrysostom, another of the fathers, in a public sermon, *pressed and urged the duty of infant baptism.*

In the fifth century, the heretic Pelagius, who de-

nied the doctrine of original sin,* which naturally leads to a denial of infant baptism, (for, if children have no sin, *the sign of the taking away of sin* ought not to be applied to them,) complained of it as a grievance, that he was even suspected of denying the propriety of infant baptism; and declared, *that, although he had visited almost every part of Christendom, he had never so much as heard of one who denied to infants the right to baptism.*

Such was the primitive faith and practice. Such also was the faith and practice of the Waldenses,* and other followers of the Lamb, shortly before the Reformation. I will transcribe an extract from their journal, or, as they called it, *spiritual almanack.* "Neither the time, nor the place is appointed, for those who must be baptized. But we do bring our children to be baptized, which they ought to do, to whom they are nearest related: The parents, or those whom God has inspired with such charity."

Another historical fact of importance, which I beg leave to mention, has but lately come to light. Buchanan, the late zealous missionary of the East, in exploring the interior of Hindostan, discovered thousands of Christians, descended from parents, who, in the fourth century, had passed from Antioch into India, and who have retained the faith and practice of the primitive church among them. These are *pedobaptists*; and when informed by the missionary of the existence of a sect in England, who denied the propriety of infant baptism, they expressed the

* With the exception of the Petrobrussians.

greatest surprise and astonishment, it being a doctrine of which they had never heard.*

Such, reader, is the information afforded by history on this subject. We can trace infant baptism, as the general and uniform practice of the church, until the time of the reformation. Then, when the very state of things seemed to favour error in speculation, and disorder in practice—then, and not till then, did the Antipedobaptists make their appearance, so as to attract any degree of attention.

In the notes to Ridgley's body of divinity,† I find the following extract taken from "Reed's apology," which is certainly worthy of your attention. "Dr. Wall, who enjoyed the best advantages for being acquainted with the history of infant baptism, and who made this the principal subject of his studies and enquiries, briefly sums up the evidence on both sides, in the following words: *Lastly; for the first four hundred years* [of the Christian Church,] *there appears only one man, Tertullian, who advised the delay of infant baptism, in some cases; and one Gregory, who did perhaps practise such delay, in the case of his own children: but no society of men so thinking, or so practising, or any one man saying it*

* Some are of opinion, that these St. Thome Christians migrated to the mountains of *Malayala*, as early as the second century. "Eusebius informs us, there were Christians in India as early as the year 189, who had the Gospel of St. Matthew in Hebrew, which they declared was received from St. Bartholomew.. *See Buchanan's Researches, also appendix to his "Star in the East."*

† Vol. iv. p. 215. Phil. 1815.

was unlawful to baptize infants. So, in the next seven hundred years, there is not so much as one man to be found, who either spoke for, or practised such delay; but all the contrary. And when about the year 1130, *one sect among the Waldenses or Albigenses declared against the baptizing of infants, as being incapable of salvation, the main body of that people rejected their opinion; and they of them who held that opinion, quickly dwindled away and disappeared; there being no more persons heard of holding that tenet, until the rising of the German Antipedobaptists in the year* 1522."

Such are the arguments to prove the propriety of infant baptism; and such is the evidence, that Antipedobaptism is a *modern aberration*, from the *good old way*.

LETTER VIII.

Objections against Infant Baptism considered, and refuted.

BELOVED PEOPLE,

SOLOMON tells us,* "He that is first in his own cause, seemeth just; but his neighbour cometh, and searcheth him." Self-love, imperceptibly, leads men to make the best, not only of their character and conduct; but also of their peculiar sentiments, and favourite systems. Nothing however can be more reasonable, than that we should suspend our judgment, in relation to both actions and sentiments, until we have heard the evidence on both sides—*until his neighbour has come to search him, that was first in his own cause.* To this we have no objection. To this *ordeal* we cheerfully subject our system, in relation to infant baptism.

Professing to love the truth, and praying to be lead into all truth, ex-parte statements must be judged unsatisfactory; and every subject which presents itself for consideration, must be examined on every side, and in all its bearings and relations. It is only by ingenuous, laborious, and prayerful investigation, that we can expect to be established in the truth; and escape the dreadful liability of *being tossed to and fro, and carried about by every wind*

* Prov. xviii. 7.

*of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.**

Suffer me then, in this paper, to place the doctrine of infant baptism more *fully* before you; and to screen myself from the charge of injustice, by giving you a *candid view* of the *leading objections* which are generally urged against it.

1. *It is asserted, by the opposers of this doctrine,* that *the want of a positive command, or, at least, of a plain example to baptize children,* renders it improper to do so. If you have attentively considered what has already been advanced, in support of our doctrine, you cannot be surprised to have me remark, that this objection rests entirely on a gratuitous assumption. It is assumed, that there is no positive precept, nor example to warrant the practice of baptizing children. Whereas, in examining the New Testament, both may plainly be discovered. The commission, given by Christ to the Apostles to teach or disciple, and then to *baptize all nations*, is (as has been justly remarked) positive and express authority for the baptism of *the infants* of such as are themselves discipled.

Here we have positive precept. Infants are a part, a numerous and important part of nations; and the Apostles were by their divine Master directed to baptize all nations, having previously instructed such among them as were capable of receiving instruction.

---

* Eph. iv. 14.

"It seems to me," says the excellent Guyse, "that μαθητευσατε παντα τα εθνη, *disciple all nations*, relates to the whole design of Christ's commission for making disciples to him; and that βαπτιζοντες and διδασκοντες αυτους, *baptizing* and *teaching them*, are mentioned as particular branches of that general design, the order of which was to be determined by the circumstances of things: And these indeed made it necessary, that in discipling adult *Jews* and *Heathens*, they should be taught before they were baptized. But other circumstances, in the settled state of the gospel kingdom, make it as necessary that they should be first baptized and afterwards taught; as the children of Jews, and of proselytes to their religion, were first circumcised, and when they grew up, were instructed in the faith of the God of Israel."

As it respects *example*, we have already referred to *five whole families*, baptized by the Apostles; and although the baptism of the *household* is not so explicitly mentioned, in the case of Cornelius and Crispus, as in that of Lydia, the Jailor, and Stephanas, yet the fact is easily discovered. And if the truth be acknowledged only in relation to the three last mentioned families, it completely answers our purpose, and is all that we ask.

But, with perfect propriety, we may ask, why this cry about positive precept, or example? Where is the necessity for them, in a case where duty is so plainly taught by clear, unsophisticated inference? The fact is, the church was already in full posses-

sion of all the information she needed in relation to this matter. If God had designed to cut off children from his visible church, then indeed it would have been necessary, by a positive revelation, to revoke the privilege granted them, in the days of Abraham? But, if God designed that children should retain their standing in his church, nothing was necessary to be said upon the subject.

There was no necessity for *positive command*, to confirm *a previous positive command*. The church membership of infants was established in the time of Abraham. That church membership was to be sealed to them, by the ordinance of circumcision. And as God did not, at the commencement of the gospel dispensation, take from children the right of church membership, they must still retain their standing in his visible church. All that could be necessary, was to have the manner, in which their membership was to be sealed, specified. This has been done, by substituting baptism in the place of circumcision. Here is instruction sufficiently explicit. Children are still members of God's visible church, and entitled to the token of the covenant: Circumcision, as the token of the covenant, has been abolished, and baptism has taken its place: Children must therefore be baptized.

Again: Before we dismiss this objection, we may, on another ground, enquire, by what authority our opponents demand a positive precept, or plain example? Do they regulate their practice, in every instance, by this rule? Certainly not. The admis-

sion of females to the Lord's table; the observance of the first day of the week, as the Christian Sabbath; and other particulars, which I might mention, are quite as deficient in positive precept, or plain example, as infant baptism is; yea, vastly more so. The truth is, duty may frequently be ascertained without these; and when it can be so ascertained, as it manifestly can in the cases above specified, it displays presumption, and not modesty, to demand them.

2. A second objeetion to the doctrine of infant baptism, is this: *Infants cannot be instructed, neither can they believe; and therefore they ought not to be baptized: Because the commission says, teach and baptize; and he that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved.* To this, we reply: Baptism requires precisely the same qualifications, which circumcision required under the law. From adults, it was required that they should believe, before they were circumcised: The same is required from adults now, before they are baptized. But as infants were then circumcised without exercising faith, so now they may be baptized without exercising faith.—Jewish infants were not better acquainted with the nature of the ordinances then in use, than Christian infants are with the nature of the ordinances now in use; neither did they possess any higher qualifications for them. And it would have been no more improper in a Jew to say, 'Infants cannot believe, and therefore infants must not be circumcised,' than for an Antipedobaptist to say,

Infants cannot believe, and therefore must not be baptized.

But let us push this argument a little further, and see where it will lead us.

1. Scripture says, believe, and be baptized. Infants cannot believe, and therefore infants must not be baptized.

2. Scripture says, believe, and be saved: "he that believeth not shall be damned." Infants cannot believe, and therefore infants must be damned!

And so this famous syllogism begins by shutting our children out of the church, and it ends by consigning all, who die in infancy, to the damnation of hell!

But let us relieve the Baptist from this sickening dilemma, by asking, whether this be correct reasoning? and whether the objection, which he raised on the ground of what is required in *adults*, both to baptism and salvation, can be urged, with propriety, either against the baptism or the salvation of infants?

Certain it is, that all the passages of scripture which require faith, (that is, the credible profession of it,) to preceed baptism, relate only to those at years capable of it, and not to infants. The same may be said as it respects salvation.

Without the exercise of faith infants may be saved, and why, then, may they not, without the exercise of faith be baptized? The objection of it proves anything—proves too much; and therefore destroys itself.

3. A third objection, urged against infant baptism, is drawn from the history of our Saviour. *He was not baptized until he was thirty years old.*—To this I reply: The compliance of Christ with the ecclesiastical institutions of his day, cannot, in every instance, form a rule of practice to us, who live under a different dispensation. Christ, we know, was circumcised; Christ kept the passover; Christ observed the seventh day, as holy time. No one will say that his example is binding upon us in these particulars. The great lesson taught by all this is, that as Christ *honoured the institutions of God's house, which were, by divine authority, in use in his day; so we are to honour the institutions of God's house, which, by the same authority, are in use in our day.* But further, the standing of the Lord Jesus Christ in God's visible church was never recognized by the ordinance of baptism. When eight days old, he was circumcised; and in that way his church membership was sealed. It could not be done any other way. The gospel dispensation had not yet been introduced; and could not be introduced until the types had received their accomplishment in the death of the Antitype. The history of Christ teaches us, that he was circumcised on the eighth day; and furnishes a fair and strong argument in favour of sealing church membership in infancy, which can now only be done by baptism.

But why, then, was Christ baptized? And what are we to understand by that transaction?—Why was he baptized? *To fulfil the law.*—What are we to

understand by it? Nothing, reader, but his *public inauguration* into the priest's office, according to the prescriptions of the ceremonial law.—Christ was now thirty years old, the time when the priests under the law entered upon their office: And he was now to enter on his public ministry, and to *fulfil all righteousness*, as he told the hesitating Baptist—he was baptized of John—that is, to *fulfil the righteousness of the ceremonial law*: "Legitimas observationes," as Beza remarks.—The ceremonial law required that the priest should be consecrated to his office, by washing, anointing, &c.* Christ was washed or baptized by John, and immediately afterwards he was anointed with the Holy Ghost.†

The whole objection is drawn from what has no relation to the subject in dispute. And, even if it were relevant, it destroys itself by proving too much. For if the baptism of Christ is to serve as an example, by which we are to be regulated in the reception of that ordinance—if the *time* that Christ was baptized, fixes the *time* when we are to be baptized—it will follow, no person ought to be baptized until he is thirty, even if he should have been converted at fifteen!

Our Baptist friends will join us, in exclaiming, This will not do! And so we think of the whole objection.

4. The fourth, and last objection, I shall notice, is this. *Baptism can be of no use to infants; and therefore ought not to be administered to them.*—To

* Lev. viii. 6, 12. † Mat. iii. 16.

this, it is a sufficient reply, to say, that *baptism* can be of as much use to *Christian children*, as *circumcision* was to the *children of the Jews*. And further; that it is impious in us to question the utility of any divine institution.

The children among the Jews were, by a positive statute, commanded to be circumcised. It was always esteemed by the Jew an important benefit, to put the seal of the covenant upon his infant offspring. The Christian has the same reason to rejoice in the privilege of offering up his children to God in baptism, that the Jew had to offer up his in circumcision. And whenever the opposers of infant baptism will prove to us, that it was of no use to circumcise children under the law—that it was an unmeaning and useless ceremony—it will then be time enough for us to show, that baptism, the substitute for circumcision, is not a useless ordinance in our day.

But this is a point worthy of serious investigation —not to refute the objection last stated, which was satisfactorily done in the general remarks just made; but to impress upon the minds of parents, that it is a sacred duty, in which the welfare of their children is deeply involved, to dedicate them, while in a state of infancy, to the living God in the holy ordinance of baptism.

The *importance* of baptism will, therefore, claim our attention whenever we shall have finished our remarks in relation to the *subjects*.

Thus have I given you an opportunity to judge of the merits of this controversy, by bringing under

your consideration the objections which are generally urged against the practice of infant baptism.—You are now able to examine both sides of the subject; and to determine on which side truth lies.

The *prominent objections*, I can assure you, have been honestly brought forward: And, indeed, I do not know of any objection, besides those which I have mentioned, which is deserving of any consideration at all. I trust, that those which have been noticed, are answered in a way which will be satisfactory to you; and tend to increase your gratitude to the God of the covenant, whose promise is *to us and our seed;* and who *confirms to them*, as well as to us, an *interest* in covenant mercies, by the *application of the authorized seal.*

LETTER IX.

The question 'Whose children have a right to the ordinances of baptism?' considered and answered.

BELOVED PEOPLE,

We have already ascertained, that unbaptized adults, making a credible profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, are entitled to the ordinance of baptism, as a token of the covenant which God made with Abraham, and as a seal of the righteousness of faith.

I trust, it has also been proved to your satisfaction, that in the covenant which God made with Abraham, an interest, and place was secured to children, of which they have never since been deprived; and that, as circumcision has been abolished, their interest and standing in that covenant can now only be sealed by baptism: And that, consequently, it must be the will of God that children should be baptized now, as much as it was his will that they should be circumcised, during the period of the Jewish church.

Suffer me now to observe to you, that all that has been advanced in favour of infant baptism, has fallen far short of proving *that infants of every description are now entitled to the ordinance of baptism.* Neither was it my design to prove this. You will bear in mind, that I expressly stated, when entering on the discussion in relation to infant baptism, that the question to be considered and decided, was not whether *all* children have a right to baptism? but whether *any* are entitled to that exalted privilege? As this question has been decided in the affirmative, we now proceed to consider a no less important question,—viz. *Whose children are to be admitted to the sacrament of baptism? Hic labor, hoc opus est,* as good old Boston says in relation to this very point. —Here lies the difficulty. May the Spirit of God lead us into all truth, and make us acquainted with the mind and will of Christ in this enquiry.

To every system, whether of theory or practice, belong certain great and leading principles, which

are to be considered and used as the land-marks of truth and duty. Several of these principles, in relation to the doctrine of baptism, have been ascertained in our preceding discussions; and it will now be necessary to call in their aid to assist us to determine the question under consideration.

You will then recollect:

1. That the visible church has been organized, in the way of a covenant made with Abraham, which remains in full force and operation to this day.

2. That in that covenant provision was made for the church membership of infants: "I will be a God to thee, and to thy seed after thee."

3. That circumcision was, by divine appointment, the token of the covenant, and the confirmation of membership, until the time of the evangelical dispensation; when baptism, by the same divine authority, was substituted in its place.

4. That this token of the covenant, and confirmation of church membership, belong only to such infants as are born within the covenant, and members of the church.

5. That no child can, by birth, be within the covenant, and a member of God's visible church, unless, at least, one of the immediate parents sustains that relation. 1 Cor. vii. 14.

These principles have all been asserted and established, in preceding papers; we have now only to make a practical application of them to the subject under consideration.

From these principles, you will at once perceive,

it results most clearly, that the children of Jews Mahometans, and Pagans, while the parents remain such, have no right to the ordinance of baptism. If the parents should embrace the truth, and on confession of faith enter the church, in the way of original connexion, their children would come in with them, and with them partake of the initiatory seal of God's house. (Acts ii. 39.) But while the parents remain Jews, Mahometans, or Pagans, having no visible relation to the church of Christ, their children, as well as themselves, must be viewed as strangers and aliens. The badge of membership may not be put upon them.

This rule admits of but one exception. It is this: If a Christian should adopt into his family the child of a Jew, Mahometan, or Pagan, so as to have the complete direction of the child's education, it might with propriety be baptized. The person adopting becomes the *moral parent*, and the case falls within the provision made Gen. xvii. 12, 13.

Again; among the inhabitants of Christendom, the children of parents both *unbaptized*, have no right to the ordinance of baptism. If the Lord should, however, touch the hearts of these parents, and bring them under the bond and token of the covenant; or, if this should be the case with but one of them, their children would then be viewed as *holy*, in the sense of the Apostle, 1 Cor. vii. 14; and consequently be entitled to the seal of the covenant.

With this practice you are well acquainted. You

know, that a child of parents, *both unbaptized*, cannot be admitted to baptism. But have you ever searched out the reason of this? Why is it so? The plain reason is this. The parents bear no evidence, no token of membership: they are strangers and aliens; and as was said Gen. xvii. 14, in the case of the uncircumcised male child, these unbaptized parents, notwithstanding they live in the heart of a Christian land, *are cut off from God's visible people—they have broken his covenant.*

The same is true; suffer me here to add, concerning church members, who have been excommunicated. Their children have no right to the ordinance of baptism, while the parents remain in a state of excision; but if the parents should afterwards give satisfactory evidence of repentance and reformation, and be thereupon readmitted into the fellowship of the church, the seal of the covenant may with propriety be applied to their children, born to them during the period of their alienation, as in the case of an original connexion.

These *negative remarks* have prepared the way for a *positive conclusion;* which is this: *The children of parents, one or both visibly related to God's church, and bearing the seal of his covenant, are entitled to baptism.* This includes not only such parents, as have made a public profession of religion; but also all others, who have been baptized in infancy, and have not subsequently been cut off, for violating the terms of the covenant.

This conclusion, you will at once perceive, so far as it respects baptized parents, (and that is the only point in controversy among pedobaptists,) goes on the well supported principle, that all baptized persons are publicly recognized members of God's church; and that, while they retain their standing, their children, being born in the church, are also members. This is their birthright. *And therefore*, to draw the conclusion in the words of our excellent form—*and therefore, as members of his church, ought to be baptized.*

But this presents, for consideration, another subject of vital importance, and nice distinction. It respects the *continued standing* of baptized persons in the visible church. That every baptized person has been acknowledged a member of the church, no one will deny. That this membership may be forfeited is equally undeniable. For unless it be admitted, that baptized persons may loose their standing in the church, we must at once throw open our church doors, in the use of a sealing ordinance, to the greatest infidels, and vilest offenders, who happen to have been baptized in infancy. If they have not been unchurched by themselves, nor by others, the standing of their children is good, and their claim on the badge of membership not to be resisted. But from consequences so impious—from so gross a desecration of a holy institution, the serious mind revolts; and most earnestly exclaims: 'Such parents can have no place in the church of God! They have lost their standing; and neither they, nor their chil-

dren, can be acknowledged as belonging to God's covenant! *They have broken the law; and their circumcision has become uncircumcision.* Rom. ii. 25.

Baptism most certainly imposes on all its subjects a solemn obligation to be the Lord's *entirely and forever;* to love his truth, to confess his name, and to shew forth his glory in a holy practice. The wilful and impenitent violation of this obligation, *involves a forfeiture* of all the privileges and blessings which baptism was designed to secure.

Those who have in infancy been solemnly dedicated to the God of the covenant, are sacredly bound, as their capacities enlarge, and according to the advantages they enjoy, to cultivate an acquaintance with the system of revealed truth. It is not left at their option, whether they will or not, read the word of God, and examine the standards of our church. They are *bound* to do so. And if it should be manifest, that they have neglected to do so—if it should appear that they are grossly ignorant of the Bible revelation, and of those excellent "forms of sound words," *the Belgic confession of faith, the Heidelbergh catechism, and the canons of the Synod of Dort;* all of which have been adopted as *standards* in our church, and which form the bond of ecclesiastical union among us; it is sufficient evidence, that they have lightly esteemed the covenant of their God, and that they are utterly unprepared to say, at the baptism of their children, "that they be-

lieve the doctrines of the church, and will instruct their children in those doctrines."

What does a man know about the doctrines of the Dutch Church, or what does he care about them, when he has never taken the pains to read her standards? The *doctrines of the Dutch Church* are not the *opinions* of this man, or that man! They are in print, and before the public.

Neither is the church now to argue the point, whether her standards are sound, nor to legislate on doctrines: She refers to them as authority, and as law; and the man, who does not seek an acquaintance with them, has no right to a place among her members.

The evil is still greater, and the cause of excision still more apparent, when a baptized person, a sealed member of the church, openly attacks and reprobates the standards of the church, in which he nevertheless wishes to retain his standing, and to offer up his children in baptism. This is most awful; and the church ought to understand the principle of *self-preservation* too well, to tolerate the existence of avowed enemies and traitors to her cause, within her pale. It is bad enough; yes, it is too bad; for a man, who knows nothing about the doctrines of the church, to say: "I believe these doctrines to be agreeable to the word of God, and I engage to teach those doctrines to my children." But, O! how much worse is it for a man to say so, who, as far as he understands those doctrines, utterly disbelieves them; who, in his family, and before his children,

heaps his foulest reproaches upon them; and threatens, on account of the obnoxiousness of their doctrines, to destroy and consume the catechism, and other standards, of the very church, in which he claims membership for himself and children! This certainly betrays so much duplicity, dishonesty, falsehood, and perjury, that we would suppose a very small degree of regard for a man's own reputation would induce him, after making such acknowledgments, and promises at the baptism of his child, to hold his peace for ever on the subject. But, whether a man will publish his own disgrace or not; the fact being ascertained, the church can hold no parley with him. The case requires prompt and decided attention; and it is sufficient to tell such a man—'You are the advocate of doctrines, which God's word, and God's church, declare to be false and heretical: You have broken the covenant, and forfeited your standing, and your claim on its privileges.'

But it has been asserted, that '*a wicked life is the greatest of all heresies.*' Without enquiring into the correctness of this assertion, I will observe, that *immorality*, or *an unholy life*, is a manifest violation of baptismal obligations; and the person so offending has unquestionably forfeited his standing, as a member of God's visible church. Baptized persons, who, as they grow up, betray an utter disregard for the authority, the Sabbath, and the worship of God; who indulge themselves (as is too much the case with the young among us,) in almost every descrip-

tion of folly, of dissipation, and of sin; who are guilty of profaneness, of intemperance, of gambling, and uncleanness; certainly give distressing evidence that they have broken through the bonds of the covenant; and that the church is fully justifiable in treating them as strangers and foreigners. Such speak not the *language of Canaan*, but the *language of Ashdod*. The grand term of the covenant is, "Walk before me, and be thou perfect."

I adventure not, let me assure you, on uncertain or untenable ground, when, in order to bring these remarks to a close, I assert, that the same love of truth, and the same correctness of conduct, are required from a baptized person, to retain his standing in the visible church, which are required from a communicant to retain his standing. Certainly nothing less than this would be required from the parent, if *he were unbaptized* to *gain admission* into the church; and as the child must derive its right from the immediate parent, nothing less than this can maintain the standing, which a baptized parent is acknowledged to have, and give to his child a right to baptism.

You have bound me to be subordinate to the Judicatories of the Reformed Dutch Church; and you have promised to submit to their authority yourselves. The highest court in the Dutch Church is the General Synod: let us hear her decision on the subject under consideration; and let us receive the law from her mouth. At the Session of the General

Synod, in 1804,* the following report was received, and adopted; viz.

"1. That the right or privilege of infant baptism does not rest upon what is called full communion, nor is the partaking of the Lord's supper by one or both of the parents, an indispensable test, for admitting infants to be baptized in the Reformed Dutch Church.

"2. That, in avoiding one extreme, which straitens admission into the church of Christ, by making a test not commanded in the word of God, it is necessary to watch against the opposite evil, which makes no distinction between the pure and the vile; and which, by an indiscriminate administration to all who apply, relaxes Christian discipline, and prostitutes the sacred ordinance of baptism: The General Synod, therefore recommend and enjoin, that when both the parents openly profess such errors or heresies; or are chargeable with such immoralities, and improper conduct, as ought, if they were in full communion, to exclude them from the table of the Lord; they shall not, during such apostacy, in doctrines or manners, be permitted to present their infants to baptism: but shall be denied that privilege, until they profess repentance, and shew amendment. When one of the parents shall be thus guilty, and the other is a decent and peaceable professor of the religion of Jesus Christ, the infant shall be baptized at the request, and upon the right of the professing pa-

* See Appendix to Minutes of 1814, p. 69.

rent; who alone shall stand, and present the child. —And lastly; when the minister, and one or more of the elders, find great ignorance in the parents, and such a want of knowledge, in the first principles of our holy religion, as to render them unfit to make a public profession of their faith; it shall be their duty to withhold them for a time, notwithstanding their decent moral conduct and profession, and frequently and affectionately instruct them previous to their admission to the ordinance, that thus, if possible, the confessions and vows, at the baptism of their infants, may be made with knowledge, sincerity, and truth."

This is substantially all that General Synods have ever done in relation to the subject, so far as I can ascertain from their minutes; unless it be to require from parents, who apply for the baptism of their children, *more full and satisfactory evidences of faith and piety*, than were supposed to be required by the resolution of 1804. In the minutes of 1814, p. 39, minutes of 1816, p. 24, and minutes of 1817, pp. 24, 26, you will find all their proceedings in relation to this subject. The whole result of which, is this: *That, although partaking of the Lord's supper, by one or both the parents, is not an indispensable test for admitting infants to be baptized; yet it is required of the parents, that they know and embrace the truth—that their practice be moral and exemplary—and that, when they come to offer up a child, as that is an act which calls for the exercise of faith, they be able to give evidence that they possess such faith.*

The Dutch Church proceeds on consistent principles. She dares not deny her own seal: But recognizes as members *all baptized persons, who love the truth, and make a practical acknowledgement of the authority of Jesus Christ.*

Such she dares not denounce as apostates. Neither can she, in the legitimate exercise of discipline, cut off such as are not guilty of the overtacts of wickedness.

The application of such parents, or of one parent sustaining such character, is not to be resisted; especially if the applicant be able, in addition to soundness in doctrine and correctness in practice, to satisfy the officers of the church that he is prepared to put his hand, in faith, to God's covenant—to assume *his own baptismal engagements*, as well as vow for his child; and, in one word, to make a *full and public profession of the religion of the Lord Jesus Christ.*

That every parent, who presents a child before the Lord in baptism, does make such a public profession of religion, I purpose to shew hereafter. It will however, previously, be necessary to enquire in what way, or by whose act, unfaithful and apostate *baptized members* are to be deprived of their standing in the church, and excluded from the ordinance of baptism for their children.—This will claim our next attention.

LETTER X.

The right and the duty of the church to exercise discipline on baptized members.

BELOVED PEOPLE,

We have asserted, that persons, who, by their baptism in infancy, have been recognized as members of the church, may loose their standing, and forfeit all the privileges and benefits which baptism was designed to secure. We now propose to enquire, *where, or in whom, the power to destroy the relation between a member and the church dwells?* Heretics and profligates are to be considered as having lost their standing in the church: But how have they lost it? By their own act? This to me is very questionable.

The relation which binds a member to the church was not constituted by himself, and cannot be dissolved by his own act. Will it be said, that the neglect to assume, at a proper period of life, the engagements, which were made over him, and for him, when he was presented before the Lord in baptism; together with a life of disobedience to the laws of Christ and his church, is a virtual denial of the act of his parents, and a public renunciation of the church and her privileges? I grant it. I grant he *has done all he* can do, *to* break the bands asunder, *and cast away the* cords, which bound him to

the visible church; and which ought to have bound him in sacred allegiance to the throne of Him, who is Head over all things to the church. But what has the church, in the mean time, done? Has she no act to perform? Does not the name of the *apostate* still stand unerazed in the register of her members? And although he has lost his membership *de jure*, does he not retain it *de facto*?

We will suppose a case. "A young man, who should evince, from the time he is capable of acting, a studied contempt for the magistrates, laws, institutions, and welfare of his country, would justly be held to have renounced all virtuous principle;" but this would not disfranchise him as a citizen: this would not make him an alien. He is still a member of the commonwealth.—And so this wicked member of the church, should he even have the bold impiety to come forward in the sanctuary, on the Lord's day; and on the very spot, where his parents offered him up in baptism, under the observation of the very congregation, and the very God, who witnessed the baptismal engagements on his behalf; to disown publicly the baptismal act of his parents, and abjure all allegiance to the church, and her God; even all this would not, and could not, of itself, destroy his standing in the church. It would only more fully prepare the way, and more loudly call for that judicial act of excision, by which alone a member can be properly and effectually deprived of his standing in the visible church.

The church alone, by her proper officers, has a

right to recognize and confirm membership; and she alone can destroy membership. Christ, who, as Mediator, is exalted on the throne of Universal Empire, has delegated to the office-bearers in his house all the power necessary to maintain its government, and preserve its purity. He has committed the *keys of the kingdom* into their hands; and they are to use them for the purpose of *shutting*, as well as *opening*, the doors of his house.

The doctrine of *self-exclusion* from church fellowship strikes at the root of all church government, and at once destroys the whole system of discipline. If a *baptized* member can excommunicate himself, a *professing* member can excommunicate himself; and the church need give herself no further uneasiness on the subject.

Let the specious, but hollow-hearted professor, who has often played the hypocrite at the Redeemer's table, and who has now grown weary of the restraints of "the form of Godliness," make a loud explosion of all the corruption and enmity of his heart, —let him pour forth his wickedness, and his blasphemy, with all the impetuosity of a stream, which has just torn away the embankment which impeded its current,—let him proclaim his apostacy, in the face of heaven; and, with satanic effrontery, "glory in his shame." The more bold his impiety, and the more loud his declaration of ecclesiastical independence, the more complete his alienation from the church, and the more unnecessary for the church to interfere. The church must not follow this

wretched apostate with the tenderness of admonition. She must not undertake to throw herself between him and destruction. Her voice of censure must not be heard; her rod of discipline must not be used. The thunders of excommunication must not be rolled around the offender's head, that others may hear its terrific sound, and be deterred from apostacy. Oh! no: this poor offender must be suffered quietly to work out his own destruction, and his own condemnation too! He must draw up, and publish to the world the sentence of his own excommunication. And while he is doing all this, the church, the affectionate, vigilant, faithful spouse of Jesus Christ, must sit still, fold her arms, and look on. She has no word to speak; she has no part to act: She remains in a state of perfect quietude, which is the very characteristic of a state of awful dereliction.

This sentiment, that members of the church—no matter whether baptized, or professing members—are to be suffered to work out their own excommunication, is replete with mischief, and ought never to be countenanced in the church of Christ. It mars her beauty; it violates her fidelity; it dishonours her Lord: It writes upon her fairest escutcheon "Ichabod," *thy glory has departed from thee.*

How greatly to be preferred is the following view of this interesting subject. "Anxiety for the good of the offender, does not admit that he should escape as a fugitive from discipline: Christ himself gives no liberty to any person to leave his kingdom

with impunity; and those who watch for souls in the visible church are accountable to the Lord for every church member, *young* or old."* The true doctrine is this: Membership may be *transferred* from one particular church to another, by proper dismission and testimonials; but membership in the visible catholic church can be terminated only in two ways,—viz. by the dispensation of *death*, and by the sentence of *excommunication*. In no other way can the connexion between the visible church and her members be dissolved. The fact is; the church is related to the member, as well as the member to the church. The relation is reciprocal, involving mutual obligations, or it is good for nothing.

If baptized persons are members of the church, (and no one can deny this,) the church must treat them as such. Her parental care, and tenderness, and discipline, must be exercised over them: She must instruct them; she must watch over them; and, when it becomes necessary, she must call them to account: And if they prove refractory and impenitent,—if they will not be reformed, by her admonitions, her prayers, and her tears,—she must *cut them off;* and in the name, and by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, take from them the privilege of church membership, which they have so greatly abused; and with them, the privilege of their children to membership in the church of God.

Neither is it necessary, that the church, in the exercise of this discipline, should wait until the bap-

* Dr. M'Leod's Eccles. Cat. p. 82.

tized person becomes a parent, and makes application for the baptism of a child. If the baptized person should never have occasion to apply for the baptism of a child, is he, therefore, to be treated as an outcast, or a heathen? Has the church nothing to do with him? Is he not one of her members? born within her pale, and recognized as one of her members, by the solemnity of the baptismal service?"

To me, it is most evident, that all who have been baptized are, from childhood up, to be treated as members of the church; and that the church has a *right*, and that it is her *duty*, to exercise discipline on such as have been baptized, as well as on such as have made a public profession of religion, is no more a question with me; than it is, that the church has a right, and that it is her duty, to instruct them.

What! shall a baptized person, a sealed member of the church, advance and propagate the most erroneous and destructive sentiments? Shall he be guilty of a practice, which openly and wantonly violates the laws of God's house; and shall the church be denied the power to call him to account, and to inflict discipline upon him? No, brethren; it cannot be: Reason, common sense, scripture, conscience—every thing serious, and every thing sacred—testify, that it cannot be.

It is certainly high time that these principles are understood. No child can be baptized, unless it be, by birth, a member of the church.—No child can, by birth, be a member of the church, unless, at least,

one of the parents be a member. In baptism, then, the standing of both parents and children, as members of God's visible church, is recognized. This fact, we think, we have clearly established, in our remarks on the Abrahamic covenant.* And if both parents and children are members, the church has an unquestionable right to exercise discipline on both, whenever it shall become proper, and necessary to do so: For it is absurd in the extreme, to talk of a society, which has not power to control its own members.

I am well aware, that this doctrine, which I have advanced in relation to the exercise of discipline on baptized persons, and especially as it respects the formal excommunication of such, may appear a *novelty* to the *serious*, and perhaps call forth the *sneers* and *taunts* of the ungodly and the profane.

To the *first*, I would say, this doctrine appears like a *novelty*, only, because church discipline has fallen into an awful state of decay; and in no particular does the church appear to have been more wanting, in the exercise of her power, than in this. Even in churches, in which the sacrament of baptism is most closely guarded, and in which no children are baptized, unless one of the parents be a communicant, this branch of discipline is greatly neglected. Indeed, that very practice seems to say to all who are not in full communion with the church, 'you are not members of the church,' and therefore we cannot baptize your children.

* See Letter iv.

In this neglect, have originated many of the evils which spread through our churches, as well as the diversity of practice in relation to baptism: And *here*, if we are to see better days in the American churches, it appears to me, reformation must begin. The young are the hopes of the church, as well as of the state; and to the young the care and attention of the church must be directed. They must have an interest in her prayers: They must receive the law at her mouth: They must be taught to reverence her authority; and early to understand, that apostacy, on their part, will compel the church of God to disown them, and rank them with those, "concerning whom she has no promises to plead." Oh! who can tell how many wanderers from the path of truth and duty might be reclaimed by the affectionate counsel, and prudent interposition of the church? How many, just entering on the downward course, might be induced to stop; and how many already far advanced, might be induced to retrace their steps; nothing, but a faithful experiment, can enable us to judge. Let the church discharge her duty; and her Master will not leave himself without a witness: He will own and bless the ordinances of his house. Faithfulness on her part will, no doubt, secure to her, by the blessing of her God, a *holy seed;* and make her glad, in the fulfilment of the promise, "Instead of thy fathers shall be thy children, whom thou mayest make princes in all the earth."*

* Ps. xlv. 16.

But this doctrine is not so great a *novelty* as you may, perhaps, imagine. The Christian church, in her purest and best days, has always attended to the instruction and correction of her baptized members. The children, born within her pale, and baptized as her property, were *nurtured* at her side, and *chastened* by her authority. In proof of this assertion, I might refer you to an excellent REPORT *on the subject of disciplining baptized children*, made to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, at their Sessions in 1812.* But as many of you may never have it in your power to see that report, I will favour you with a few extracts from it. "This, (says Cave,) was the *discipline*, under which Christians were brought up in those times. Religion was instilled in them betimes, which grew up and mixed itself with their ordinary labours and recreations." (Primitive Christianity, p. 173, 174, 7th ed. Lond.) As an instance of this, he quotes Jerome, as saying of the place where he lived, "you could not go into the field, but you might hear the ploughman at his hallelujahs, the mower at his hymns, and the vine-dresser singing David's Psalms."†

"The censures of the church, (Bingham informs

*This REPORT, while it exhibits the *views* and *practice* of the primitive church in relation to baptized members, gives us also to understand that *some* of our Presbyterian brethren (I hope *many*,) feel anxious to have this branch of discipline extensively introduced, and faithfully enforced. We regret, that the General Assembly did not unhesitatingly express a favourable opinion of the principles it contains.

† Page 16.

us, b. 16, ch. 3, s. 11,) seldom or never touched them, whilst *minors*, or children under age, there being more proper punishments thought fit for them —such as fatherly rebukes, and corporal correction: And to inflict the highest censures upon such, was rather thought a lessening of authority, and bringing contempt on the discipline of the church." "Thus, the same author says, Augustine, who flourished in the fourth century, (Epis. 159 to Marcellinus,) assures us, the kind of punishment, by stripes, was often or commonly used, not only by school-masters and parents, but by Bishops in their consistories also." "One of the rules of Isidore of Seville, who flourished in the sixth century, was, 'that they, who were in their minority, should not be punished by excommunication, but according to the quality of their negligence or offence, be corrected with congruous stripes."*

From these extracts, detailing faithful historical testimony, we may learn what were the *views* and *practice* of the primitive church, in regard to her baptized children. The views and practice of the churches of the Reformation are next noticed in the report. "The Reformed Churches of Bohemia, of France, of Holland. waiving any notice of others, in their standards, have recognized the principle, that baptized children are under the watch and discipline of the church. By the two last, especially, specific regulations are given for the education of their children; and schools are directed to be established un-

* Pages 17, 18.

der the inspection of the eldership in every congregation."*

Having such authorities, to support their views, of church membership, and church government, as established by the word of God; is it surprising that the above mentioned report should contain sentiments, and suggestions, like the following: "The children of those parents, who profess faith and obedience, as before-described, being thus the proper recipients of the privilege of baptism, are also legitimate subjects of Christian discipline. As members of the household of faith, they are subject to its rules and its authority, in the same manner as children are subject to the rules and authority of the house or family to which they belong. They are not subject as adults until they become adults, but as children; and that care and discipline, which is suited to their age and character, must be exercised over them. This is fully established, in the form of discipline and government of our church (Presbyterian) in that part which relates to forms of process, chap. 1. sect. 1, where it is said, "Inasmuch as baptized persons are members of the church, they are under its care, and subject to its government and discipline.' And in the Directory for Worship, chap. 9, sect. 1, it is said, 'Children, born within the pale of the visible church, and dedicated to God in baptism, are under the inspection and government of the church."†

Again; after stating that baptized children *must be admonished*—1st, *by* THEIR PARENTS; 2nd, *by*

* Page 18. † Page 11

THEIR TEACHERS *in the schools or colleges where their parents have placed them;* and 3d, *by the* OFFICERS OF THE CHURCH, *in their official capacity, whenever they become the subjects of such admonition;* the report proceeds: "When admonition has failed, and a suitable time has elapsed, with a distinct understanding on the part of offending children of this issue, the church must proceed to *exclude* them from her communion. This duty belongs only to the church, through the instrumentality of her officers. Neither parents, nor teachers, have any share in this part of the discipline of Christ's house. Even the civil magistrate may not interfere; for he is himself subject, in his official capacity, to the spiritual authority of *the church.*"*

One extract more from this valuable report, and we will dismiss it. It is a *word of lamentation*, in which we sincerely concur. "Though THE PRINCIPLE, that baptized children are subjects of church discipline be thus acknowledged by the Reformed Churches generally, and by ours particularly, according to the unquestionable and laudable example of the primitive church, it is a lamentable truth, that it is not carried into effect in any of them, as it ought to be. In the earliest, and purest periods of their existence, they did, in a considerable degree, act upon this principle. But now, from the most of them, if not all, the glory, in this respect, is departed. Children of the faithful are still considered proper recipients of the privilege of baptism; yet

* Page 45.

they are suffered to live as if they were not subjects of Christian discipline."*

The doctrine of *disciplining* baptized members was also well understood, and faithfully practised, by the New-England churches in their puritan days. In the PLATFORM OF CHURCH DISCIPLINE, agreed on at Cambridge 1649, they say (chap. xii. sect. 7.) "They [that is, baptized members,] are also under church-watch, and consequently subject to the reprehensions, admonitions, and censures thereof, for their healing and amendment, as need shall require."†

In *the answer of the Elders, and other Messengers of the churches, assembled at Boston in the year* 1662, *to the questions propounded to them, by order of the honoured General Court*, they say: "The infant seed of confederate visible believers are members of the same church with their parents; and, when grown up, are personally under the watch, discipline, and government of that church."‡

In *confirmation* of this, they say, "*That, when these children are grown up, they are personally under the watch, discipline, and government of that church*, is manifest: For 1. Children were under Patriarchal and Mosaical government of old, Gen. xviii. 19, and xxi. 9, 10, 12. Gal. v. 3; and therefore under *congregational* discipline now.—2. They are within the church, or members thereof; and therefore subject to church judicature, 1 Cor. v. 12.

* Page 20. † Mather's Magnal. vol. ii. p. 196.
‡ Mather's Mag. pp. 239, 240.

—3. They are disciples; and therefore under discipline in Christ's school, Mat. xxviii. 19, 20.—4. They are in church covenant; and therefore subject to church power, Gen. xvii. 7, with xviii. 19.—5. They are subjects of the kingdom of Christ; and therefore under the laws and government of his kingdom, Ezek. xxxvii. 25, 26.—6. Baptism leaves the baptized in a state of subjection to the authoritative teaching of Christ's ministers, and to the observation of all his commandments, Mat. xxviii. 19, 20; and therefore in a state of subjection unto discipline. —7. Elders are charged to take heed unto, and to feed, (that is, both to teach and rule, compare Ezek. xxxiv. 3, 4,) all the flock, or church, over which the Holy Ghost hath made them overseers, Acts xx. 28. That children are a part of the flock, was before proved; and so Paul accounts them, writing to the same flock or church at Ephesus, chap. vi. 1, 8. Otherwise irreligion and apostacy would inevitably break into churches, and no church-way left by Christ to prevent or heal the same; which would also bring many church members under that dreadful judgment of being let alone in their wickedness, Hos. iv. 16, 17.*

Upon this subject, I can also refer the reader to a series of excellent essays, from which I have derived great assistance; published some years since in the CHRISTIAN'S MAGAZINE, edited by the learned DR. MASON, then of New-York, now President of *Dickenson College, Carlisle.*†

* Mather's Magn. p. 248.

† *See particularly*, vol. iii. pp. 18, 19, 20.

Neither has *our own church* been entirely unmindful of her duty to baptized members. In our General Synod of 1812, the following resolution was passed;* viz. "Resolved that the question 'Are adult persons, living within the bounds of a congregation, who have been initiated by the ordinance of baptism in infancy, but who are not members in full communion, to be considered subjects of discipline, and to be dealt with as such?' be answered in the *affirmative;* so far as it respects those who have been baptized in the Dutch Church, or have acknowledged themselves members of the congregation."

This, we think sufficient evidence, that the doctrine of disciplining baptized members is not a *novelty.*

With regard to the *thoughtless and profane*, who may *ridicule* the idea of discipline to be exercised on them, as they are not professors of religion, and with the bold impiety of *giants* in wickedness "defy the armies of the living God;" I have only to observe, that, when a member of the church, no matter whether young or old, has arrived at such a pitch of wickedness, as to set at defiance the authority of the church, he most manifestly deserves her severest discipline. Neither would the exercise of such discipline be so completely disregarded, as offenders would, perhaps, wish us to believe. The public degradation, and excision of a few bold offenders, after

* This resolution is also found in the appendix to the last edition of our constitution, p. 264.

more lenient measures had been found ineffectual, could not but be felt in a congregation. And even if the offenders themselves were not reformed by it, many others, in the road to ruin, but less hardened in impiety, might take the alarm, pause, and turn back.

But the offenders *themselves* would soon be made sensible, that, notwithstanding all their unsanctified bravery, it is beyond the power of man to make *discipline* feel comfortable. "It will," says Dr. Mason, in the essay already referred to, "It will be no recommendation, even with thoughtless people, that a young person fled away from the voice of kindly instruction—much less that he was thrust out on account of his vices. Some there are, who, to serve the present hour, would applaud his spirit; and, on the first disagreement, would upbraid him with his disgrace. It is not in human nature to stand easily under an excommunication of *any sort*. Exclusion for faults, from any decent society, is, and ever will be, a stigma. Whoever disbelieves it, has only to try."

Such then, brethren, appears to me to be the duty of the church, in relation to her baptized members. Let the unholy and profane be cut off, and you at once guard against the profanation of the sacrament of baptism, and also free the officers of the church from endless perplexities, and most painful responsibility.

The assertion, that neither heresy nor immorality, on the part of a Jew, debarred his child from the

ordinance of circumcision, can easily be proved to be incorrect. But, I believe, it would be exceedingly difficult to prove, that circumcision was ever denied to a child among the Jews, unless the parent's conduct had previously been noticed and censured by the proper authorities. "The Jews (says Boston,) were to be excommunicated for heresy, impiety, and profanity. This must needs be granted, unless we say, that there was no such thing as excommunication amongst them: for who could be excommunicated but such?" And then adds, from GOODWIN'S *Moses and Aaron*, "that those among them that were excommunicated, with the least degree of excommunication, called NIDDUI; those who were the *aposynagogoi*, their male children were not circumcised."

Here then, as I remarked before,—here is the point at which reformation must begin! The church must be faithful to her members, before she can expect her members to be faithful to her.—May the Spirit of God be poured out on all the churches, and a pure and salutary discipline revived throughout all the borders of Zion!

LETTER XI.

Engagements made by parents, when offering up their children in baptism.

BELOVED PEOPLE,

Of all the subjects, which have hitherto claimed our attention, none is more important, than that which we are now to consider; viz. *the engagements made by parents, when offering up their children to God in baptism.* If this subject be correctly understood, I flatter myself, that there will be little difficulty in bringing about the reformation among us, which these letters are designed to produce. For I cannot but think, that correct views here, will deter many, who now manifest an anxious desire to have their children baptized, from assuming the dread responsibility, connected with one of the most solemn oaths that man can make—at least, until they are possessed of higher qualifications than they have heretofore expressed, either in words or actions.

But to proceed: We have stated, that the child of a parent, who has been acknowledged a member by baptism, who is possessed of competent knowledge, and who has not been cut off for error in sentiment, or immorality in practice, is, by birth, a member of the church; and as such, entitled to baptism—even though the parent has not taken his seat at the Redeemer's table. In the latter particular, he

has certainly neglected his duty; but as it is difficult, and even impossible, to determine at what precise period of life, a baptized person is bound to commune, under pain of excommunication, the church may well hesitate before she puts a promising youth, sound in doctrines, moral in practice, and respectful in all his deportment to the institutions of religion, to the chilling alternative of either violating his conscience, by coming to the table of the Lord, or else submit to be cut off as a heathen, and thrown into the same putrid mass with apostates and vile offenders.

Such baptized persons, sound in doctrine, and moral in practice, are rather, in the judgment of charity, to be viewed as *believers;* and upon *giving credible evidence of this* to the officers of the church, they are to be admitted to sealing ordinances—whether the application is first made for a seat at the Lord's table, or for the baptism of a child, is immaterial.

I have never been able to discover the necessity, nor even the propriety, of compelling baptized persons to *begin* their profession of religion with the sacrament of the supper. The sacraments are equally holy; and to participate in one of the sealing ordinances of God's house is as much *a public profession of religion,* as to participate in the other, or in both. I know that it is not so understood by many. A large proportion of parents, who wish to have children baptized, are entirely ignorant of what is implied in that solemn transaction; and too many

even show that they care nothing about it. It is time—high time, that people should be made to understand this matter. It is high time that the applicant, for the baptism of his child, should be told: "Sir, you have come to take hold on God's covenant: you have come to perform an act—viz. the dedication of your child to the living God—which calls for the exercise of faith. In one word, you have come to make a *public profession* of the religion of the Lord Jesus Christ." If he expresses a readiness and willingness to do this, let his examination, in relation to both Christian doctrines and Christian experience, be conducted with the same solemnity and strictness, which would be considered necessary, if, instead of applying for the baptism of his child, he had made application for a seat at the Redeemer's table. If the examination be satisfactory, the child is to be admitted upon the presentation of the parent; who is ever after to be considered as, to all intents and purposes, a professor of religion.

But, if the parent refuses to submit to such an examination—or if, upon being examined, he is unable to give evidence that he is prepared to make a public profession of religion—he cannot be permitted to act in this holy ordinance for his child. Yet, as he has not been cut off for any overt act of wickedness, his child is born within the pale of the church, and entitled to the seal of membership, although he is not qualified to make the offering. What is to be done in such a case? Manifestly it

offers a most favourable opportunity to admonish the parent for his unfaithfulness; to remind him that the renovation of his own heart is an object of greater importance to him than the baptism of his child; and to exhort him to seek, without delay, an interest in the righteousness and grace of the Lord Jesus Christ; and then to come, and take hold of God's covenant on his own behalf, as well as on behalf of his child.*

But, if the parent still urges the baptism of his child, even though he is not permitted to make the dedication of it, what is to be done in such a case? The answer to this question, we conceive to be suggested, by asking another: What is to be done in the case of a child, whose parents were qualified to make the offering; but who were snatched away by death before they had an opportunity to present their child before the Lord in baptism? The church undoubtedly has a duty to perform in both these cases. She, as their mother, is to see to the baptism of all children born within her pale: She is to present the child, whose parents are dead; and she, too, is to present the child, whose parents are unqualified to make the offering, especially when there is reason to believe that such parents will not interfere with the subsequent duties, which the church, as a

* This is what the General Synod calls withholding them for a time, that thus, if possible, the confessions and vows, at the baptism of their infants, may be made with knowledge, sincerity, and truth. *See extract* from Min. 1804.

mother, will owe this child, to bring it up *in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.*

Cases of this kind will, however, be found to be of rare occurrence. Those who are destitute of true faith, and unqualified to offer up their children to God in baptism, we have every reason to suppose will commit such open sins, as will make it evident to all that they deserve to be cut off, and as will fully justify the officers of the church in passing upon them the sentence of excommunication.

But as some may think that it is carrying the matter too far, to assert that every person, who offers up a child in baptism, makes a public profession of religion, as much as he would if he were to come to the table of the Lord, it may be necessary, before we proceed any further, to establish our position.

1. Our first argument is drawn from the *transaction itself.* The promise "I will be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee," lies at the foundation of the baptismal rite. To this *promise*, the parent, at the baptism of his child, is supposed to respond, and to embrace the covenant, of which it is a prominent feature. This covenant cannot be *partially* embraced. The recognition and acknowledgment of it may be hypocritical; but it must professedly be *complete.* That the parent, in offering up his child, acknowledges God as the God of his seed, is perceived at once. But he has no right to do so, while he leaves himself out of view. God never promised to be the God of the child, without being,

at the same time, and even previously, the God of the parent. The promise can only reach the child through the parent. In offering up a child in baptism, the parent, therefore, takes hold of the promise originally made to Abraham, and recognized by the Apostle Peter at the commencement of the gospel age: He assumes his own baptismal engagements, as well as vows for his child: He puts his own hand to God's covenant; and says openly, before God and his church, "God is my God, and God is the God of my seed." Now, you might just as well question, whether a man moves when he walks, or breathes while he lives, as to question whether he makes a profession of religion when he offers up his child in baptism.—He acknowledges God's covenant, or he does not. If he does not, he has no right to baptism; for baptism is secured only by this covenant. If he does, he publicly declares himself a member of God's church established by this covenant, and a professor of the true religion. The fact is, the whole transaction is significant, and proclaims an acknowledgment of the covenant of God; and a solemn consecration of both parent and child to his glory and service.

2. Our second argument, to prove that a person, in having a child baptized, makes a public profession of religion, is drawn from the FORM, used at the baptism of children among us. Cast your eye, in the first place, on the TITLE—"Form for the administration of baptism to the infants of *believers*." Now, who are believers? The church certainly

knows none as believers, but such as give her reason to view them in that light. There may be believers who are not professors; but the church does not know them. She can acknowledge those only as believers who make a credible profession of the religion of the Lord Jesus Christ. These she stiles *believers*, or *faithful*,* or *beloved in the Lord Jesus Christ*.†

Pass on now to the *Form itself*; and notice these words: "Whereas in all covenants there are contained two parts: Therefore are we by God, through baptism, admonished of, and obliged unto new obedience—viz. that we cleave to this one God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; that we trust in him, and love him with all our hearts, with all our souls, with all our mind, and with all our strength; that we forsake the world, crucify our old nature, and walk in a new and holy life."

To offer up a child in baptism is, then, to enter into covenant with God. In this covenant there are *two parts*: God's stipulation is the *first* part—"I will be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee." The stipulation of the parent, on behalf of his child, is the *second* part: *He is to cleave to the Triune God—to trust in him—to love him with all the heart, soul, mind, and strength;—he is to forsake the world, to crucify the flesh, and to walk in a new and holy life.*

---

* See Conf. of Faith, art. xxxiv.

† Address after the prayer.

What think you, reader. Is not this making a profession of religion? Could you promise more than this, if you were to approach the Redeemer's table? Would to God that all our communicants felt, from day to day, the binding power of *such engagements*, as parents make, when they offer up their children to God, in baptism!

3. We find a third argument in favour of our position, *in the extract from the minutes of the General Synod of* 1804, which I have already laid before you. If you turn back to that paper, you will find these words: "And lastly, where the minister, and one or more of the elders, find great ignorance in the parents, and such a want of knowledge in the first principles of our holy religion, as to render them unfit to make *a public profession of their faith*, it shall be their duty to withhold them for a time,——that thus, if possible, the *confession* and vows, at the baptism of their infants, may be made with knowledge, sincerity, and truth."

Here, then, the General Synod speak of a *profession of faith*, and again of a *confession*, made by those who have their children baptized, even though they have never come to the Lord's table; which, say they, "is not the test for admitting infants to be baptized in the Reformed Dutch Church."

4. Finally; I argue from *the case of the unbaptized adult*. You understand perfectly, that such a man cannot be baptized, without making a credible profession of religion.—Now, I only ask, whether a man does *less*, when he has his *child* baptized, than

he does, when he has *himself* baptized? Whether it requires fewer and lower qualifications—whether it imposes fewer and lower obligations—to act in this matter for his *child*, than to act for *himself*? You might just as well say, that it requires less physical power, in a parent, to perform an action when it is done for his child, than when it is done for himself. And whenever you can convince me, that it requires less strength to raise a weight, or carry a burden, when you do it for your child, than when you do it for yourself, I will listen to such doctrine.

These considerations, as I conceive, satisfactorily prove that every person, who offers up a child to God in baptism, makes a full and public profession of religion; and as a public professor of the religion of Jesus Christ, he stands engaged *to walk in all the ordinances and commandments of the Lord blameless;* and especially, with the company of God's professing people, to surround the Redeemer's table, and in that affecting ordinance *to shew forth the death of his Lord.* If this be neglected, the church is in duty bound to notice his conduct, and deal with him, precisely as she would with an adult, who had received baptism, and afterwards neglected to commune,—or as she would with a communicant, who should neglect to offer up his child to God in baptism. In either, and in all of these cases, it certainly would belong to the officers of God's house to exhort, to rebuke, to warn; and if admonitions and entreaties were disregarded, to have recourse to severer discipline.

But as infant baptism particularly contemplates the *privileges and welfare of children*, it is necessary, in addition to the general engagements made by the parent to obey the law, and honour the institutions of God, as a professor of religion; to notice *particularly* the engagements which he makes in behalf and for the welfare of his child. These may be ranked under three heads—viz. *instruction*, *prayer*, and *example*.

1. The parent, who offers up a child in baptism, engages to attend to its *instruction*; not only to teach it to read the Scriptures, but to assist it in acquiring correct views of the great and leading doctrines of revelation. "To see the child," as our form expresses it, "instructed and brought up in the aforesaid doctrine, or help, or cause it to be instructed therein, to the utmost of his power." The parent then engages to teach his child the doctrines of the confession of faith, and other standards of the Dutch Church: And not only to instruct it himself, but also to help and cause it to be instructed; that is, to afford the church, by her proper officers, an opportunity to dispense to it catechetical and other instruction.—Yes, reader, if you have had a child baptized, you have promised not only to teach it at home, but also to give your minister an opportunity, in his catechetical exercises, to instruct it; and now, if you do not see to it, that your child attends on these exercises, you break your covenant engagements, and you resist one of the ordinances of God. The instruction of children, depend on it, is a most impor-

tant duty; and I have too much reason to conclude, that this duty is lamentably neglected among us. We have too few parents and grand-parents among us, like Eunice and Lois: and therefore we have so few among the young, like Timothy, *acquainted with the scriptures from a child.*

2. The parent, who has offered up a child to God in baptism, *has engaged to pray for, and with his child.* Baptism, instruction, and every other ordinance, will be ineffectual to the salvation of our children, without the blessing of God; and he but half performs his duty who undertakes to instruct his children, without praying for a blessing on his exertions. He is a most unfaithful, cruel parent, who does not carry his children, young immortals, in the arms of faith and prayer, to the throne of grace, that they may there be enriched with the blessings of the covenant.

But it is not enough that the parent prays *for* his children; he is bound, solemnly bound, to pray *with* them, and to worship God, *as the God of his family.* Attention to this important duty (a duty so generally neglected, and the neglect of which so painfully proves the low state of religion throughout this region of country,) ought, I have no doubt, except in very extraordinary cases, to be required as a *term of admission* into the church, and an approach to sealing ordinances. Do you engage to worship God in your family morning and evening, by reading his word, celebrating his praise, and calling on his name? is a question which ought to be put to

every head of a family applying for church fellowship, by the officers of every church: and yet I know of but one, among all the churches in this county, in which such engagement is explicitly demanded. Depend upon it, the Lord will visit the churches for their unfaithfulness in family duties, and particularly that of worship. He will sooner or later "pour out his fury upon the families that call not on his name."

We would rejoice to see such rules as the following enforced in every section of the Redeemer's church: viz. "Forasmuch as the conscientious observance of family worship hath lamentably fallen into decay among professors, it is enjoined on the officers of the church to use every exertion, that it may be duly maintained by those under their charge; to deal with, and censure, according to their offence, such church members as shall be found remiss therein; *and by no means to admit, either to the table of the Lord, or to baptism for their children, any, by whom it is habitually neglected.**

3. We mention *example*—a holy, godly example, on the part of the parent, enforcing his instruction on the attention and conscience of the child. It was said by Him, whose judgment is according to truth, concerning Abraham—"I know him, that he will command his children and his household *after him.*"† He will command them *after* him. He will

* Con. and stand. of the Assoc. Ref. Church.—New-York 1799, p. 571.

† Gen. xviii. 19.

go before, and lead the way, and direct them to follow on in his footsteps.

Reader: What prospect of success attends the instruction of a parent, who in his practice contradicts all the lessons he inculcates on his children?—who, instead of sanctifying the Sabbath, openly violates that holy day;—who, instead of praying with his children, stuns their tender ears with his oaths and blasphemies;—who, instead of leading them up to the sanctuary of God, takes them by the hand, and conducts them to places of amusement and scenes of dissipation?

Oh! we have too much of this *corrupting* example among us; and many parents, who have had children baptized here, have much to answer for, in this respect! The parent, who has his children baptized, engages to set before them an example worthy of their imitation; and to say to them, as Paul did to the Corinthians—"Be ye followers of me as I also am of Christ." 1 Cor. xi. 1.—God give you grace so to do!

LETTER XII.

The importance and advantages of baptism.

BELOVED PEOPLE,

WHEN noticing the last objection* urged against infant baptism, by the opposers of that doctrine, I promised, in a future paper, to call your attention more particularly *to the importance, and advantages of that ordinance.* I now propose to fulfil that promise.

And suffer me to observe, in general, that every *divine institution* must, and does bear the marks of wisdom and utility. God does nothing in vain. And to question the beneficial tendency of any of his ordinances, is as great presumption, as it is to question the wisdom and goodness of Him who appointed them. An infidel, whose darkened understanding, and whose carnal mind, have shut out the rays of divine truth, may ask, What use is there in reading the Scriptures, or in attending on public worship? And because his wicked heart has not *received the truth in the love of it*, he may draw the impious conclusion, that no benefit is to be derived from the reading, or the preaching of God's word; when, at the same time, thousands of God's people, who, because they *were ordained to eternal life, have through grace believed*—have found them to be *the*

* See Letter viii.

power of God, and the wisdom of God, unto salvation.

But the part which the infidel acts, in relation to the system of revealed truth, is not more unreasonable and wicked, than is the conduct of those, who, in relation to the ordinance of baptism, and especially infant baptism, continually, and with an air of triumph, ask, 'What is the use of it? What good does it do? What purpose can it answer to sprinkle a child, or even a man, with a few drops of water?' To all objections and questions of this sort, a "thus saith the Lord" is a sufficient reply. God has commanded it to be done, and therefore we are bound to do it; and to do it too under a deep conviction and belief, that the institution, like every thing else which proceeds from Him, is *holy, and wise, and good.*

A practical writer* on the sovereignty of God, observes: "Be subject to his ordinances. If he please to command the using such means, as have no natural virtue towards such an effect, as in Moses stretching his hand over the sea, and smiting the rock with his rod; so water in baptism, and bread and wine in the Lord's supper: Presume not to say 'What is there in these?' Godliness is a mystery, which only faith can understand. There is no divine institution but hath meat in it, which you know not of, which, if rightly used, will speak for itself. If he please to make clay of dust and spittle, con-

* Elisha Coles, see Practical Discourses, p. 40.

demn it not; but submit to his will and way, and be thankful for thy cure."

But it is not necessary, neither would it be an act of kindness and faithfulness to you, to dispose of this subject in so summary a manner. I conceive it to be evident, from what has already been said, and, as I think, proved, that whatever benefits resulted from circumcision, must be secured by its substitute, baptism; together with such additional advantages as belong to the improved character of the evangelical dispensation.

Now, that circumcision was a great privilege, attended with peculiar advantages, is evident from the following considerations.

1st. God, who cannot trifle, and who will not deceive any of his creatures, declared repeatedly that the separation of Abraham from his idolatrous relatives, and his removal out of Ur of the Chaldees, was designed to secure to him, and his posterity, most important privileges and blessings.—Do you ask, what privileges and blessings? I answer, the privilege and honour of giving birth to Messiah, *the desire of all nations*, and the Saviour of the election of grace.—I answer again, the privilege and blessing of having the church, *the pillar of truth*, and the repository of revelation, organized in his family.—I answer, thirdly; the privilege and the blessing of *circumcision*, as the visible token of membership in the church so constituted; and the authorized seal of the righteousness of faith.—These certainly occu-

by the highest rank among the blessings promised and secured to faithful Abraham, and his seed.

Further: The peremptory manner in which the ordinance of circumcision was enjoined—the penalty of excision, by which it was enforced—and the displeasure of God against Moses for neglecting to circumcise his children—all prove the institution to have been important; and the observance of it necessary to secure the advantages promised by God to his covenant people.

2. Consult now the feelings of the Jews; feelings produced by the most enlightened views of truth and duty, and identified with the best exercises of the heart. The seal of the covenant was, in every period of the Jewish church, and especially in periods of reformation and distinguished piety, deemed by every Hebrew a prerogative of inestimable worth. "Uncircumcised," to use the words of another—"*uncircumcised*, was the most bitter. and disdainful reproach, which his mouth could utter: He would sooner lay his children in the grave, than permit them to go without the token of their being Abraham's seed."

This feeling of the Jews was interwoven with their very constitution; and twining its tendrils round every fibre of their hearts, exerted itself in all its power on the day of Pentecost; and with all the propriety of reason, with all the authority of revelation, and with all the tenderness of parental affection, loudly called for privileges and rights in behalf of their offspring.

When the Apostle directed the anxious, enquiring, and believing multitude, to be baptized—and thus to receive, as Christian converts, the seal of the covenant under its evangelical form—all the tenderness and solicitude of the parental heart, now softened by divine grace, were brought into liveliest exercise. What! exclaims the anxious Jew, What is to become of my children, the fruit of my body, for whose recognition, as members of the visible church, God made special provision in his covenant with my great progenitor Abraham? I cannot accede to terms like these. I cannot cross the threshhold of the Christian church, and leave my babes behind. I cannot, I must not accept of baptism, as the token of the covenant in the place of circumcision, and thus unchurch the children whom God has given me!

Peace! peace, says the Apostle. The form of sealing the covenant only is changed. The covenant, in all its extent and operation, in all its privileges and immunities, remains untouched. The promise is still to you and your children. Bring your infant offspring with you—and let them, with you, receive the seal of God's covenant in its Christian form.

Such were the feelings of the Jews in relation to circumcision; and that these feelings were not superstitious and unauthorized is evident from the words of the inspired Paul, who, in answer to the objection, "What advantage hath the Jew, and what

profit is there of circumcision?" briefly and emphatically replies, "Much every way." Rom. iii. 1, 2.

But if circumcision secured important advantages and privileges; and if baptism has come in the place of circumcision, as the authorized token of God's covenant, under the dispensation of the gospel, by which dispensation a greater degree of light is diffused, and a greater amount of benefits is conferred, it will follow, as a matter of course, that baptism is of high and holy importance; and that to be baptized ourselves, and to have our children baptized, ought to be viewed as a special and inestimable privilege.

If it still be asked, What are the particular advantages which are secured by baptism? and in what respect is the condition of a baptized person better, than that of one who is unbaptized?—I answer;

1. By baptism, the subject, whether in an *adult* or *infant* state, *is recognized as a member of God's visible church, according to the constitution of it, in the family of Abraham; so that now God is his God in a visible covenant relation.* God has fixed his own terms of relationship, and requires that that relationship should be publicly witnessed in *his own way.* To neglect the application of that particular seal, which he has been pleased to designate—or to substitute any thing else in its place—is to pour contempt upon God's covenant, and to declare our estrangement from him and it. The uncircumcised male child among the Jews was cut off from God's

people, for he had broken his covenant. The same may, with equal propriety, be affirmed concerning those who, in our day, are destitute of the seal of the covenant, in its evangelical form.

We do not mean to assert, that none can be in a state of favour with God, and heirs to eternal life, without having been baptized. But we do mean to say, that none *are* visibly so: None *can* be visibly so, while destitute of the seal, appointed to evidence such interest in God's favour and covenant. They are *openly* "strangers and foreigners," whatever their *secret* standing in the sight of God may be. If, then, it be a privilege to bear the authorized token of an interest in his covenant, and a name and place among his people,—if there be any advantage in having a right to address God as *our God*, yea, as *our covenant God*,—baptism must be an important and desirable distinction. All this baptism manifestly secures.

2. By baptism, *the subject is entitled to the prayers, the instruction, the care, and discipline of the church.* I am well aware, that the importance of this consideration cannot be duly appreciated by us. No advantage can be derived or calculated on from a *neglected* duty; and that the duties above alluded to (and most important duties they are,) are very generally neglected, is too notorious to be denied, and too bad to be excused. Even the *prayer*, which is offered up in the baptismal service, is treated as though it were the prayer of the minister and not of the church! I can assure you, that I have often

been pained to notice the indifference, the listlessness, vacant stare, or rolling eyes of the congregation, when that prayer is sent up to the throne of the Eternal. It is a holy and solemn service, in which the congregation, and particularly the church, ought to join, as much as in any other prayer—especially when we recollect that baptism is a sacrament to the *church*, as well as to the *child*.

The young are an interesting part of the church's charge. For them her prayers should unceasingly ascend,—to them her most assiduous care should be given,—to them her lessons of instruction should be addressed,—over them the rod of her authority should be stretched out.

And this, brethren, will be the case when the church shall arise from the dust of her present degradation, and put on the beautiful garments of purity, of zeal, of devotedness to her Lord. Then the fruits of her prayer, her instruction, and her discipline, will be seen and felt among her youth; who, when they arise to call her blessed, will also bless her Lord for that important relation, which secured to them her prayers of faith, and her labours of love.

Brethren, are the prayer, the instruction, and the care of God's people, worth any thing? By the value of these you are to estimate the importance of baptism.

3. The baptism of infants is important, because *it solemnly binds their parents to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.* I do not mean to intimate, that those who are not so bound,

do not make conscience of "training up their children in the way they should go." But I do mean to say, that it is important to be urged to the discharge of our duty, by public and covenant engagements. We have no reason to apprehend that we shall be over-burdened with considerations to incite us to be faithful. Practical writers have often suggested the expediency of using a *set form* in our secret and personal engagements to be the Lord's; and every Christian has found it useful publicly and formally to own, and, from time to time, to renew his covenant with God, his Saviour, at the sacramental board. Must it not, then, also be useful to make public engagements for our children; and by so doing give a solemn pledge, before God and his church, that we will bring them up for the Lord? Will not the recollection of having given such a pledge have its effect upon parents, in the discharge of their duty? Will not the parent say, 'I stand committed before God and the church: I have sworn, and I must perform it: I have excited the hopes and the confidence of my fellow Christians, and I dare not disappoint them?" We confess that we know nothing about human nature, if something of this kind may not reasonably be expected. Nay; will not the fact, that such engagements as the baptismal service demands, which have been made for him by his parents, have an effect upon the child, whenever he becomes capable of understanding their nature? That must be a depraved son indeed, who, when he grows up, will pay no attention to a

covenant into which his father entered on his behalf when he was an infant.

As then "by baptism, administered to infants, we obtain a solemn bond of parents that they shall perform parental duties conscientiously to their children," it must be evident, that baptism is both to them and the community useful and important.

4. I have a fourth consideration, to prove the importance of this ordinance.—It is this: *By baptism the subject is brought in the way of God's covenanted mercy.* The visible church, which God has engaged to protect and preserve, is the great channel, not only for the transmission of truth, but also for the communication of spiritual benefits. We do not limit the power of the Holy One, nor deny the right of God to scatter his choicest blessings beyond the pale of the visible church. But we do honour God as a consistent Being, as having a regard for his own institutions, and especially for the promises of his grace. And we do appeal to the ordinary course of his providence, to prove that his saving mercy runs in the channel of his church, and of the families of his people, bearing the token of *their* relation to the church.

Of all these advantages the venerable Synod of Cambridge (1649) had a correct view, and high estimation. In their Platform of Church Discipline, chapt. xii. sec. 7, they say: "Yet these church members that were so born, or received in their childhood, before they are capable of being made partakers of full communion, have many privileges

which others (not church members) have not: They are in covenant with God; have the seal thereof upon them, viz. baptism; and so, if not regenerated, yet are in a more hopeful way of attaining regenerating grace, and all the spiritual blessings both of the covenant and seal: they are also under church-watch, and consequently subject to the reprehensions, admonitions, and censures thereof, for their healing and amendment, as need shall require."*

There is a manifest reason for this. God has engaged *to honour such as honour him.* Baptism is a recognition of God's everlasting grace and faithfulness. It honours him as the God of grace: it lays hold on his covenanted mercies: it publicly declares "this God is our God, for ever and ever!" And to such, he is never backward to respond in the message of his word, and in the dispensation of his grace too, "These are my people."

These are great and important privileges and benefits secured by baptism, whatever the *present* spiritual state of the subject may be in the sight of God. The adult believing subject indeed derives additional, and still more important advantages, from it. To him it is *a seal* of his ingrafting into Christ —of his interest in that blood which cleanses from all sin, and that grace which sanctifies the depraved, and prepares for glory. It strengthens his faith—it confirms and brightens his hope—it pacifies his conscience—it rejoices his heart. It is the pledge of

* See Mather's Magnalia, vol. ii. p. [illegible]

his Father's love—of his Saviour's grace—of his own salvation.

Thus have we given you, a brief view of *the importance and advantages of baptism*, not only as it respects adult believers; but also as it respects their tender offspring.

And now, we ask, Is it surprising, that it should be very gratifying to the feelings of pious parents to have their children baptized? The decision of *natural* parental feeling is in favour of privileges for children; and the decision of *sanctified* parental feeling must certainly be in favour of *religious* privileges for children. Yes; the pious parent, who longs for the salvation of his children, whose constant prayer is, "O! that they might live before Thee," brings them, with holy joy and gratitude, to Jesus Christ, in the ordinance of baptism; that the Master may lay his hands upon them, and bless them. To him, it is one of the choicest exercises of God's house.

If any should wonder and enquire, why I have not noticed the removal of *original sin*, as one of the important advantages of baptism, when applied to infants? I have only to say, in reply, that I am unacquainted with any such doctrine, as taught either in Scripture, or in the standards of our church. Let it rank with the notion, that baptism gives a *name* to the child, or that it softens down the asperities of its temper, and renders the little creature more tractable and quiet!—Away with superstition

and error! They but obscure the splendour, and mar the beauty of truth!

Baptism! sprinkling with water! take away sin? It is unreasonable. It is impossible.—The dispensation of grace may attend, and no doubt often does attend, the dispensation of ordinances; but there is no radical and inseparable connexion between them. And even if there were, the fact then would be—not that baptism takes away sin—but that the grace of God, connected with baptism, produces this effect. But even this will not answer.

We witness too much around us, every day, to stamp this sentiment with falsehood. We have too many *baptized heathen* among us to admit this as true. If their original sin was taken away by baptism, how have they become so wicked? Original sin consists of imputed guilt, and inherited depravity; and if original sin be taken away, *depravity* as well as *guilt* must be removed. And then, such will grow up, without manifesting that strong propensity to sin, which characterizes other descendants of fallen Adam: Yea, they will grow up, in the full exercise of the feelings and propensities peculiar to holy beings. Did you ever see this?

Parents, do not your eyes—do not your aching hearts—give the lie to this most unscriptural sentiment? Baptism is a sign; and not the *sign*, but the *thing signified*, takes away sin. Your children, as well as yourselves, must be justified by the righteousness, and sanctified by the grace, of the Lord Jesus; or they will never be freed from sin, nor

cleared from the sentence of condemnation, already in force against them, as guilty and depraved creatures!

May God impart to you, and your children, his pardoning mercy and sanctifying grace, through Christ, the Redeemer!

LETTER XIII.

The subject, relating to infant baptism, pressed upon the consciences of parents—Certain questions proposed for their consideration—Short addresses to professors, and church-officers.

BELOVED PEOPLE,

THE *doctrine of baptism* has now been placed before you. And as little need be said, by way of improvement, in relation to the baptism of adults, which is not of frequent occurrence among us; I design in this paper to press upon your consciences such considerations, relating to infant baptism, as to me appear solemn and important.

That the ordinance is very imperfectly understood, and greatly abused among us, is too manifest to be denied.

A great, and almost unconquerable desire to have children baptized prevails; while, so far as I can ascertain, but very few are anxious to discover the

will of Christ, in relation to this matter; and to see that the duty is performed according to his directions. Who among us stops to enquire, whether it be right or wrong? whether a blessing or a curse will attend it? If your children are only baptized, you appear to think all is well! O! no; dear friends, you must answer for this to your Judge! And depend upon it, the baptism of your children can be of no advantage to you, nor to them, when its very administration violates and profanes one of the institutions of Jesus Christ. Surely we have too many, who act like the profaners of God's name and ordinances, spoken of in the fifty-eighth chapter of Isaiah, and who deserve the same rebuke. "Cry aloud, spare not; lift up thy voice, like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins." ver. 1.

Like those hypocritical Jews, you too pretend to honour God, and to think highly of the ordinance of baptism! Christ, you say, has appointed it; and you cannot bear the thought, that your children should go unbaptized. But, if this be true, how is it that you are so regardless of the authority of Christ in every other respect? Why does not his revealed will influence and regulate your general practice, and bind you especially to an observance of that affecting ordinance, which commemorates his sufferings and death? The obedience which God requires from us is *universal*, as well as *sincere*. "It esteems God's precepts *concerning all things* to be right, and hates every false way,"—"it walks in all

the ordinances and commandments of the Lord blameless."

But the obedience of many of you, who have had children baptized, and who may wish to have others baptized hereafter—if it can be called obedience at all—is manifestly partial: and gives too much reason to suspect you of being guilty of that very hypocrisy, which you with much self-complacency charge upon others. You are very ready to say, concerning the inconsistent, immoral communicant, '*There goes a hypocrite!*' But do you not perceive, that this charge applies, with equal propriety and force, to all who have profaned the sacrament of baptism? I am not disposed to screen from deserved censure such communicants, as wantonly violate their covenant engagements, and deny and crucify the Lord, to whom they have sworn allegiance. It is painful to me to think, how many communicants there are in every part of the Christian church, not excepting our own, who give too much cause to the enemy to charge them with hypocrisy, and to blaspheme that holy name whereby they are called. But, unless my eyes have deceived me, the greatest and most awful instances of hypocrisy, which I have ever witnessed in the church of Christ, have not occurred among communicants, but among the profaners of the ordinance of baptism. Judge yourselves. What is it for a man to assent, at the baptism of his child, to doctrines as true, which he has never examined, and which, when stated to him, he rejects with contempt? What is it to take an

oath of fidelity to Jesus Christ, and his cause, and then to desert his worship, as some of you have done, and not to be seen in the sanctuary for months in succession?—to forsake also, the company of the godly, and mingle with the unholy and profane, making his enemies, and the enemies of his cause, your bosom friends and chosen companions? What is it to promise "to train up a child in the nurture and admonition of the Lord," and then to set before it an example of profanity, of Sabbath-breaking, of drunkenness, and, in a word, of complete disrespect for every thing sacred and divine? Oh! if this be not hypocrisy, I know not what hypocrisy is; and that hypocrisy too, connected with the most awful perjury, deliberately committed in the presence of God, and his church. May God convince you of your error and your guilt, and influence you to the exercise of sincere repentance!

You may, perhaps, now upbraid me for my candour; but I can assure you, that what I have done, has been done in faithfulness to my Master, and in love to your souls, and the souls of your children. And remember, that what I have done, will take from you the opportunity of upbraiding me, in the day of judgment, with having been accessary to your guilt and your condemnation! The subject is important, all-important: I hope you will lay it to heart.

I renew the request—and a most reasonable one it is—that you will take the Bible, and the standards of our church, in your hand; and, reviewing the

sentiments I have advanced, ask yourselves, as in the presence of your Judge, 'Are not these things so?' Let the word of God speak; let the standards of our church speak; let conscience speak. The time is not far distant when these *will* speak—and speak in a way, which you will not be able to disregard!

But you will, perhaps, ask me, "What do you wish us to do? Do you wish to have our children left unbaptized, to grow up like heathen?" Better, far better, dear friends, to have your children unbaptized, than to profane, by their baptism, one of the sealing ordinances of God's house; to take upon yourselves engagements, under the solemnity of an oath, which you never design to fulfil; and to make a profession of religion, which you intend utterly to disregard. But my wish is not that your children should remain unbaptized. I have urged the importance, and the advantages of baptism. My wish is, that you should offer them up with knowledge—with sincere and believing hearts; and that you should ever after be careful and conscientious, to perform your vows to the Lord.

Think not, O think not, that I, by an improper assumption and exercise of power, undertake to debar you! God is my witness, that I would not throw the smallest obstacle in your way, to present comfort, and the gratification of every lawful desire, any more than in your way to future and eternal glory! But Jesus Christ forbids the profanation of the sacraments of the covenant: He debars the unquali-

fied: He has not only enjoined *what is to be done* in his church; but he has also prescribed the *manner in which it is to be performed.* And now, if contrary to his direction, you seize, with an unholy hand, on one of the sealing ordinances of his house, what have you to expect but his severest displeasure? How will you answer for it to your Judge, when he asks you, *Who hath required this at your hands?*

True,—for you will suffer me to repeat it,—true, it is a duty, and a privilege, to consecrate our children to God in baptism. But, to render this an acceptable duty, and a real privilege, it must be done understandingly and sincerely. We must know, and we must feel, that, by that act, we lay hold on God's promise,—we put our hand to God's covenant; and make a solemn profession of religion, and devotedness to him. Now, if your conscience testifies that you are prepared for this,—if you can lay your hand upon your heart, and say "This day I avouch the Lord to be my God, and to walk in his ways, and to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and to hearken to his voice,"*—it is well. The church has no right to ask more.—But, if your conscience will not permit you to say as much as this, let your first wish be, not to have your children baptized; but to become prepared to offer them up sincerely and acceptably,—to become prepared to place them, by faith, in the arms of that

* Deut. xxvi. 17.

Saviour, who said "Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of heaven."

I have now a few questions to propose for your serious consideration, and then I have done with you for the present. I propose them to every parent, who wishes to have his children baptized.

1. Do you consider yourself a member of God's church; bound to obey the laws of Christ's kingdom, and to submit to the government and discipline of his house?

2. Do you consider yourself as possessed of the qualifications, necessary to devote yourself to God in baptism, if you were unbaptized? If so, why do you not come to his table, which we expect every adult, whom we baptize, to do? If not, how can you offer up your child? Can you do more for your child, than you can do for yourself?

3. Does not a person, who has a child baptized, bind himself, under the solemnity of an oath, "to walk in all the ordinances and commandments of the Lord blameless; and is he not then bound to partake of the supper?

4. Finally: Is not the notion, that it requires fewer and lower qualifications to have a child baptized, than it does to go to the supper, derived from a corrupt practice of the church, and not from the word of God?

These questions I place before you. I hope you will seriously and prayerfully meditate upon them;

And may the Spirit of God furnish you with correct answers to them!

FELLOW PROFESSORS,

I have a word to say to you.

Whatever impression these well-designed papers may make upon the thoughtless and profane—I calculate on your countenance, support, and prayers, in bringing about a reformation in relation to the ordinance of baptism. Such a reformation is greatly needed; and all the friends of the Lord Jesus Christ must assist in it. In this thing, *you are to know no man after the flesh.* If it be a brother, or a sister, or a child, that is put under censure, and so deprived of the privilege of presenting his or her offspring, your first enquiry is to be Is this right? If so; your next enquiry is to be this: 'For whom am I—a communicant in God's house, a sworn friend to the Lord Jesus Christ—for whom am I to feel the greatest regard; for Christ and his ordinances, or for earthly relatives and friends? The church must suffer, or offenders must suffer. And I hope, you will not hesitate to show that you love Christ more than parent or child—more than sister or brother; and that you prefer Jerusalem above your chief joy.

BRETHREN OF CONSISTORY,

You are associated with me in the government of God's house; and it has not been the least gratification I have enjoyed, during my settlement here,

to find you ever willing to exercise a prudent, yet firm discipline: And I would now be guilty of great unkindness and injustice, did I even suspect you of unwillingness to co-operate with me in guarding against the profanation of the holy sacrament of baptism.

Let me, however, remark to you, that increased prudence, zeal, and firmness will be required in producing a reformation, which I know you have greatly desired. You must, with your minister, bear the heat and burden of the day. You must stay up his hands, as did Aaron and Hur the hands of Moses, that Amalek prevail not against Israel.

The views I have endeavoured to support, and according to which I should feel gratified to have our practice regulated, may be stated in very few words.

1. Every baptized person is a member of the church, bound to perform the duties of a member, and subject to the watch and government of the church.

2. Every person, making application for the baptism of his child, is to be considered as expressing his desire to take hold of the covenant made with Abraham, which requires holiness of heart and practice; and ought therefore, upon the first application, to give evidence, that he is prepared to make a public profession of religion.

3. Every person, so making a profession of religion, and neglecting to commune, ought to be dealt

with in the same manner, as would be considered necessary, if a professor should be regular in his attendance at the Lord's table, but neglect to offer up his child or children in baptism.

And now to the God, that is in covenant with his church and people,—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; the God, into whose name we have been baptized, —the God of the Bible, and the God of salvation,— three distinct and equally glorious persons, in one undivided and all-glorious Essence,—be ascribed, equal, undivided, and eternal praises.——Amen.

LETTER XIV.

Sacrament of the Supper, instituted by Christ—Command to observe it, binding on all in gospel countries, who have come to years of understanding—especially on baptized persons.

BELOVED PEOPLE;

HAVING finished our remarks on baptism, the first sacrament of the covenant of grace, under its evangelical administration; we now proceed to submit to your consideration a few reflections on the *sacrament of the supper.*

We have before remarked, that every positive institution must originate in a Divine command. To Christ, as King in Zion, appertains the right to appoint sacraments; and the business of the church is, to administer and execute his appointments, according to his own directions. "In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men."*

Our first enquiry, therefore, in relation to this ordinance, must respect *its origin, and the obligations which it imposes upon us to glorify God, in its devout celebration.* To these particulars, we now solicit your attention.

Of the *origin* of this institution, the writers of the New Testament give the following account.

* Mat. xv. 9.

"And as they were eating [the passover] Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples; and said, Take eat, this is my body. And he took the cup and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins."* With this, the account given by Luke,† as well as that given by Mark,‡ substantially agrees. Paul, who did not originally belong to the company of the Apostles, and who was consequently not present when the supper was instituted, was, after his conversion, favoured with a special revelation on the subject, which, accompanied with some remarks dictated by the Spirit of inspiration, we have in his first Epistle to the Corinthians.§ "For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus, the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he brake it; and said, Take eat, this is my body which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner, also, he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood; this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come. Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the

* Mat. xxvi. 26—28.
† Chap. xiv. 22—25.
‡ Chap. xxii. 19, 20
§ Chap. xi. 23—29.

Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body."

Here then, we have the appointment of Jesus Christ, the glorious Head of the Church, making it the Christian's duty, in this ordinance, to shew forth the death of his Lord. "Christ (says our Heidelbergh Catechism,) has commanded me, and all believers, to eat of this broken bread, and drink of this cup, in remembrance of him."* The duty is plainly stated; the injunction is positive and peremptory "This do in remembrance of me."

Such an injunction, issuing from the lips of Him, who holds our breath, and our destiny in his hand, nothing but the most daring impiety will presume to treat with disrespect. The command of the Supreme Legislator must be law to every created intelligence; and wo to him who disregards the authority of this "one Lawgiver, who is able to save, and to destroy!"† Let such, then, as neglect and despise this ordinance bear in mind, that it is the Great God, the Judge of quick and dead, whom all heaven and earth are bound to obey, and before whom the very devils tremble, who has said "This do in remembrance of me."

But this Great God, the Creator, Upholder, and Judge of all, is *the God of our Salvation*—"The Great God, our Saviour." And it is not so much in

* Sect. 28. Quest. 75. † Isa. iv. 12.

his Divine, as in his Mediatorial character, that Jesus Christ challenges our obedience in the sacrament of the supper. While enduring a painful exile from the heavenly world, and suffering for us, and our salvation, he instituted this feast, and enjoined it upon all his followers, thus to "shew forth his death until he comes."

Oh! who can trifle with a *Saviour's* love? Who can disobey a *Saviour's* command? And that, too, a command issued under circumstances the most solemn and affecting? It was the *same night*, in which Jesus was betrayed, that he instituted the supper. When the *garden* and the *cross* spread all their horrors before him! In that hour of the power of darkness, when we would suppose every thought and every anxiety must have been, with inconceivable intenseness, fixed upon himself, and the death he was to accomplish at Jerusalem: In that hour his love for his people burned with a pure and vehement flame; and his anxiety was exercised to promote their welfare and their comfort. For their refreshment and encouragement, while on their march to glory, he instituted this supper. It is the *dying command* of the Saviour of sinners, who will dare to withhold obedience? Who does not cherish with peculiar interest, and execute with greatest fidelity, the *dying requests and injunctions* of a fellow-mortal? Who does not bear in mind the *parting directions* of an earthly friend? Who can forget what his father told him, when stretched upon the bed of death? And shall we forget thy *dying command*, Redeemer

of our souls—our Saviour—and our All? Shall we ungratefully turn our backs on the scenes of Gethsemane and Golgotha; and declare before the church, and in the face of heaven, our unwillingness to keep alive the recollection of thy sufferings and death, in the sacrament of the supper? Oh! no: it must not be. Hell cannot furnish an instance of such black ingratitude.

> "Jesus, thy feast we'll celebrate—
> We'll shew thy death, we'll sing thy name—
> Till thou return; and we shall eat
> The marriage supper of the Lamb!"

Let the reader, who pretends to be so afraid of an unworthy approach to the table of the Lord, then, bear it in mind, that every time he fails to partake when this ordinance is dispensed, he is guilty of disobedience to the high command of Heaven; a disobedience, aggravated by the circumstance, that it pours contempt upon the *dying command* of the blessed, and only Saviour. O! be assured, that it will be vastly more difficult to account to your Judge for such neglect and disobedience, than it is to satisfy your conscience at present, under a pretence that the fear of partaking unworthily deters you from approaching the sacramental board. I venture to call this a *pretence;* because, with very few exceptions indeed, I have never among the multitude, who make such excuse, seen any thing like serious and anxious efforts to become prepared.

But, some one may ask, 'Is no preparation necessary for a seat at the table of the Lord? Are no

qualifications to be attended to, before we adventure to participate in that holy ordinance? Most unquestionably, reader; most unquestionably. And we purpose hereafter to show, what preparation and qualifications are necessary. It answers our purpose at present to tell you, that the want of preparation does not justify your disobedience to the dying command of the Saviour. It is your duty to be prepared: and the neglect of one duty can never be accepted as an excuse for the neglect of another duty. The law among the Jews, regulating attendance on the passover, was this: "But the man that is clean, and not in a journey, and forbeareth to keep the passover, even the same soul shall be cut off from among his people: because he brought not the offering of the Lord in his appointed season, that man shall bear his sin."* Nothing but *ceremonial uncleanness*, or *unavoidable absence*, could excuse the Israelite; and even in such a case, it was required of him to attend on the extra-passover, to be observed on the fourteenth day of the second month by all who had been lawfully prevented from attending at the stated time.† Moral uncleanness, or the want of sanctification, could form no excuse. It was his duty to be holy; and, as I before remarked, the neglect of one duty can never, with propriety, be urged as an excuse for the neglect of another duty.

It is so now. "God now commandeth all men every where to repent."‡ "And this is his com-

* See Numb. ix. 18. † Numb. ix. 10, 11, 12.
‡ Acts xvii. 30.

mandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son, Jesus Christ."* The command of God, making it your duty to repent and believe, is as plain and binding as any precept of the moral law. And you may, with as much propriety, and as much safety too, say that you will be guilty of profanity, of Sabbath-breaking, of theft, of uncleanness, or of any other sin forbidden in the Decalogue—as to say, that you will not repent and believe the gospel. It is altogether a mistaken idea, that it is left at your option, whether you shall or shall not honour the Lord Jesus Christ, by confessing his name and commemorating his death. And it betrays more than mistaken ideas upon the subject,—it betrays a heart bent on wickedness,—to neglect this duty, because you wish not the sphere of your indulgences to be contracted—and to bind yourselves to that tender and holy practice, which the profession of religion demands. All this, I repeat it, is your duty,—your solemn duty: and if you neglect it, you neglect it at your peril! Your sentence of rejection is already recorded on the inspired page! The final and all-righteous Judge has declared, that *those who will not confess him before men, he will not confess before his Father, which is in heaven!*†

The Judicial process must, in such a case, assume a form somewhat like the following:

Judge. Why did you not commemorate my sufferings and death, in obedience to my dying command?

---

* 1 Jo. iii. 23. † Mat. x. 32, 33.

Sinner. Because I was unprepared for that holy ordinance.

Judge. But, why were you not prepared?

Sinner. Because I rejected the gospel offer! refused to repent of my sins—to embrace a crucified Redeemer by faith, and devote myself to his service!

What an excuse!—The very excuse contains matter of indictment; and merits the damnation of hell!

But I have another consideration to urge; a consideration full of tenderness; and yet applicable to most of you who have not yet made a public profession of religion, by shewing forth the Saviour's death, in the communion of the supper. I allude to the relation in which most of you stand to the church of the living God. Baptized in infancy, you bear upon you the seal of membership. As members, you are bound to perform the duties of members, and *to walk in all the ordinances and commandments of the Lord blameless.* One of the leading duties devolving upon you, as members of Christ's church, is a public recognition of your relation to the church, and the Head of the church, in the devout celebration of the ordinance of the supper. Nothing can be more reasonable than the expectation, that all who have been baptized in infancy, will, at a suitable age, when they have become competent to examine themselves, and "to discern the Lord's body," attend to this duty. Nothing can be more just than that they should be censured, if

they continue to neglect it. The seals of the covenant belong to the children of the covenant: and it is at once their honour, their interest, and their duty, to make use of them.

But, in pressing this duty upon you, I am convinced that I cannot do better than to avail myself of the excellent remarks of a distinguished writer of the present day:

"Many young persons," says he, "imagine that they are not members of the church, until upon a personal profession of their faith, they join it in the communion of the holy supper. This is a great mistake. The children of Christian parents are *born* members of the church. Their baptism is founded upon their membership; and not, as some people suppose, their membership upon their baptism. On the same principle, when they arrive at the years of discretion, they may, in taking upon them their baptismal engagements, by a becoming profession of the Lord Jesus, *demand* a seat at his table, as their *privilege*, which the church cannot deny. Their allegiance to him, as their Redeemer, their King, and their God, is inseparable from their birth-right. The question, then, with them, when they reach that period of maturity, which qualifies them to judge for themselves, is, *not* whether they shall contract or avoid an allegiance, which has hitherto had no claims upon them? but, whether they shall acknowledge or *renounce* an allegiance, under which they drew their first breath? Whether they shall disown the Prince of Life, and waive their interest

in his church? Whether they shall disclaim the God of their fathers; forswear their consecration to his service; take back the vows which were made over them, and for them, when they were presented to him in his sanctuary; his blessed name called upon them; and the symbol of that "blood, which cleanseth from all sin," applied to them? Not whether they shall be simple *unbelievers;* but whether they shall display their unbelief in the form of *apostacy?* *That* is the question: and an awful one it is! As they value their eternal life, let them consider, that every hour of their continuance in their neglect of Christ, is an hour of contempt for his salvation, and of slander on his cross! How shall their hearts endure, or their hands be made strong, when he shall come to reckon with them for their *treading him under foot, and counting the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing?* Reckon with them he will! and precisely for their *not owning him:* For they cannot—no, they cannot shake off their obligations to own him; although, in the attempt, they may destroy themselves forever!

"According to this representation," I shall be told, "the condition of many of our youth is very deplorable. It is their *duty*, you say, to profess the name of Christ; and to seal their profession at the sacramental table. This they cannot do; for they are conscious, that they do not possess those principles and dispositions which are requisite to render such a profession honest. What course shall they

steer? If they do not profess Christ, they live in rebellion against God! If they do, they mock him with a lie! Which side of the alternative shall they embrace? Continue among the profane, and be consistently wicked? or withdraw from them in appearance, and play the hypocrite?".

The case is, indeed, very deplorable. Destruction is on either hand. *For the* UNBELIEVING *shall have their part in the lake of fire!** *and the* HYPOCRITE'S *hope shall perish!*† God forbid that we should encourage, either a false profession, or a refusal, to make one. Their duty is to embrace *neither* side of the alternative. Not to continue with the profane, and not to act the hypocrite; but to receive the Lord Jesus Christ in truth, and to walk in him. "I cannot do it," replies one; and one, it may be, not without moments of serious and tender emotion upon this very point. "I *cannot* do it!" My soul bleeds for thee, thou unhappy! but it *must* be done—or thou art lost forever! Yet, what is the amount of that expression: in the mouth of some a flaunting excuse—and of others a bitter complaint—I cannot? Is the inability to believe in Christ, different from an inability to perform any other duty? Is there any harder necessity of calling the God of Truth *a* LIAR, in not believing the record which he hath given of his Son, than of committing any other sin? The inability created—the necessity imposed—by the ENMITY *of the carnal mind*

* Rev. xxi. 8. † Job viii. 13.

*against God?** It is the inability of wickedness, and of nothing else!—Instead of being an apology, it is itself the *essential* crime! and can never become its own vindication.

But it is even so. The evil *does* lie too deep for the reach of human remedies. Yet a remedy there is, and an affectual one. It is here——*I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean; from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A* NEW HEART *also will I* GIVE *you; and a* NEW SPIRIT *will I* PUT *within you: And I will* TAKE AWAY *the* STONY HEART *out of your flesh, and I will* GIVE *you an* HEART OF FLESH. *And I will* PUT MY SPIRIT WITHIN YOU; *and* CAUSE *you to walk in my statutes; and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.*†

Try *this* expedient. Go with thy "filthiness," and thine idols:" Go with thy "stony heart," and thy perverse spirit—which are thy real inability—to God, upon the *throne of grace:* Spread out before him his "exceeding great and precious promise;" importune him as the hearer of prayer, in the name of Jesus, for the accomplishment of it to thyself. Wait for his mercy! It is worth waiting for. And remember his word: *Therefore will the Lord wait, that he may be* GRACIOUS UNTO YOU; *and therefore will he be exalted, that he* MAY HAVE MERCY *upon you: for the Lord is a God of judgment; blessed are all they that wait for him.*"‡

* Rom. viii. 7. † Ezek. xxxvi. 25—27.

‡ Isa. xxx. 18.

I make no apology for the length of this quotation. It is the concluding part of one of those excellent essays on the CHURCH OF GOD, published in the *Christian's Magazine.* The extract I have now favoured you with is in vol. 2nd, and begins on p. 413.

I pray the Lord it may be sanctified to you!

LETTER XV.

The nature of the ordinance of the Supper unfolded, by a consideration of the names applied to it in Scripture.

BELOVED PEOPLE,

HAVING proved, that the sacrament of the supper is an institution of the Lord Jesus Christ, which all who assume the Christian name are bound to observe, under pain of his displeasure; we now propose to direct your attention more particularly to the *nature* of this ordinance.

"The Lord's supper, (say the Westminster Divines,*) is a sacrament of the New Testament, wherein by giving and receiving bread and wine, according to the appointment of Jesus Christ, his death is shewed forth; and they that worthily communicate feed upon his body and blood, to their

* Larger Cat. Quest. clxviii.

spiritual nourishment and growth in grace: have their union and communion with him confirmed; testify and renew their thankfulness, and engagement to God, and their mutual love and fellowship with each other, as members of the same mystical body." With this agrees the view given by Witsius* of this ordinance. "The Lord's supper (says he,) is the sacrament of education or nourishment in the New Testament Church; wherein by the symbols of bread broken, and wine poured out, the dreadful sufferings of Christ are represented to believers; and the promises of the New Testament, and enlivening communion with Christ made perfect by sufferings, both in grace and glory, are signified and sealed to them."

The nature, design, and use of this holy ordinance, are well stated in the 35th article of our Confession of Faith. The length of the article forbids our transcribing it: We hope, however, that you will turn to it, and examine it attentively.

The definitions we have transcribed, place before you the nature of this ordinance in general. Much additional information may be gained, by noticing the various names and terms which Scripture employs in speaking on this interesting subject: all which names and terms have reference to the nature of the ordinance, and collectively set before us its high excellence and vast importance.

1. The Apostle Paul, in writing to the Corinthians,† calls this ordinance Κυριακον δειπνον, *the L*

* On Cov. vol. iii. p. 417.

† 1. Epi

supper; and this, as you all know, is the name by which it is now ordinarily distinguished in the church. *Lord's supper.* This not only directs our attention to the *Author;* it being an institution of the Lord Jesus Christ, as we have already shown: but it also evidently alludes to the *time* when this ordinance was instituted—viz. at the usual time for eating suppers. It was in the *evening* of the same night in which Christ was betrayed, and immediately after the celebration of the Jewish passover.*

But another, and a very important idea, we conceive to be embraced under this appellation. The ancients, we are told, had their greatest feasts in the evening. Suppers were their choice meals, and social entertainments. This suggests an idea of excellence in this Christian institution. It is a feast. Hence the Apostle says,† "Let us keep the feast." The ancients had their feasts on their sacrifices. Christians, too, have their feast on a sacrifice, even that one great sacrifice by which the covenant of our God has been ratified—by which the guilt of myriads has been expiated—and the souls of myriads have been redeemed! O! how delightful to hold a feast on such a sacrifice! It is to the believer; hungering and thirsting after righteousness, and longing for communion with his Saviour; a feast indeed; more grateful and refreshing to the soul, than the choicest luxuries, collected from every clime, can possibly be to the taste. Such was the experience

* See Mat. xxvi. 20, &c. Also 1 Cor. xi. 23, &c.

† 1 Cor. v. 8.

of the Spouse.* "I sat under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste." Similar to this is the prophetic description given of this ordinance in the writings of Isaiah: "And in this mountain shall the Lord of Hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things—a feast of wines on the lees; of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined."† Accordingly the invitation of the Master of the feast is "Ho! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money: Come ye, buy and eat; yea, come buy wine and milk, without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness."‡ "Eat, O friends: drink; yea, drink abundantly, O beloved."◊

These remarks on the term *supper* may well be summed up in the words of a celebrated Divine.‖ "Besides, (says he,) the most sumptuous entertainments among the ancients, especially in the Jewish nation—at least, their nuptial feasts—were generally in the evening. (Parable of the ten virgins, Mat. xxv.) And therefore it was proper, that the feast, which represents the unspeakable dainties of heaven, and is an earnest of *the marriage supper of the Lamb*, (Rev. xix. 9,) should be held forth to us under the name and emblem of a supper."

* Cant. ii. 3. † Chap. xxv. 6. ‡ Isa. lv. 1, 2.
◊ Cant. v. 1. ‖ Witsius on the Cov. vol. iii. chap. 17, § 2.

2. This sacrament is in 1 Cor. x. 16, called *the communion of the body and blood of the Lord Jesus.* In this ordinance believers have communion with Christ as their mystical Head: "They sup with him, and he sups with them." They freely communicate to him all their wants, tell him all their distresses, and cast all their cares upon him: while he no less freely communicates the supply of their wants, and gives them new assurance that *his grace shall be sufficient for them, and that his strength shall be made perfect in their weakness.* They feed upon Christ and his fulness; and receiving fresh confirmation of their union and communion with him, they severally exclaim "My beloved is mine, and I am his."

But believers not only have communion with their Saviour, in the use of the symbols of his body and blood: They have sweet and endearing communion with each other, as partakers of the same faith, members of the same family, and heir to the same blessings. Their *common* interest in the benefits of the Saviour's death is signified and sealed to them; and with kindred feelings, and with heart, knit to heart, they taste the sweets, and enjoy the consolations of the *communion of the saints.* With each other, as well as with Christ, believers have communion, in the broken body and shed blood of their Lord.

3. This sacrament is called *the breaking of bread —and the table of the Lord.** These expressions, used in reference to the supper, teach us that no altar is necessary, and that wafers are improper, in

* 1 Cor. 16, 21.

the administration of it. The elements are to be placed, not on an altar, but on a table—*The Lord's table.* And the bread, to represent the breaking of Christ's body, must be broken. *The bread which we break.* This cannot be done when wafers are used.

4. Finally: I observe, that this ordinance is in Scripture called the *cup of blessing*, and *the cup of the Lord.** It is the *cup of the Lord*, inasmuch as the wine is the appointed symbol of the blood of the Lord Jesus, which, as well as the broken bread, is to be distributed among all who attend on the ordinance. It is also *the cup of blessing*. Christ, when he instituted this ordinance, *gave thanks, and blessed the elements.* So his ministering servants are, by prayer and thanksgiving, solemnly to consecrate the elements—that, under the blessing of the Lord, they may prove seals and pledges of covenant mercies. By this act of consecration, as we shall show hereafter, no *substantial* change is effected. The change is only sacramental; and the elements are thus "sanctified by the word of God and prayer."†

Further: *The cup of blessing.* Ευλογιας, ευχαριστιας,‡ *thanksgiving.* The term *Eucharist* was very generally applied to this ordinance by the Primitive Fathers; and in this, their example is followed by many in our day: And may with propriety be understood to refer, not only to the consecration of the elements already mentioned; but also to the *joy* and

* 1 Cor. x. 16, 21. † 1 Tim. iv. 5. ‡ Mat. xxvi. 27, also 1 Cor. xi. 24.

gratitude, with which believers ought to celebrate this feast of love. Historians inform us, that the celebration of this ordinance in the primitive church was characterized by the liveliest expressions of gratitude and joy. And indeed, what can be more proper than feelings like these, on a communion Sabbath? True, many tender and mournful feelings must necessarily mingle in the services of such a day; and hard is the heart, which is not penetrated with the deepest sorrow for sin—accursed sin, which crucified the Lord of Glory! which does not "look on him whom we have pierced, and mourn for him, as one that mourneth for his only son, and is in bitterness for his first-born."*

But notwithstanding this, a communion Sabbath is on many accounts a most joyful occasion—calling for the liveliest feelings of gratitude, and the warmest expressions of praise: And we may well ask, as God did by the Prophet Isaiah, in relation to the ancient fasts,† "Is this a day for a man to afflict his soul; to bow down his head as a bulrush; and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him?" Oh! no: It is the Christian jubilee,—it is the festival of our redemption,—it is the triumph of Zion, and of Zion's King, which we celebrate. "Rejoice in the Lord, O ye righteous; for praise is comely for the upright."‡ "O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together."§ "Let Israel rejoice in him that made him: let the children of Zion be

* Zech. xii. 10. † Chap. lviii. 5. ‡ Ps. xxxiii. 1.
§ Ps. xxxiv. 3.

joyful in their King."* It is the kind promise of our God, "I will bring them to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer."†

God grant that you may always find great joy, and unspeakable consolation, in waiting upon in this holy ordinance! the *nature* of which has now, in some degree, been unfolded, by a consideration of the names applied to it in Scripture.

---

*Ps. cxlix. 2. † Isa. lvi. 7.

LETTER XVI.

The nature of the supper further unfolded, by a consideration of its external signs, and form of administration—A brief view of the absurdity of transubstantiation, and the impiety of the mass—The doctrine of Christ's presence stated.

BELOVED PEOPLE,

THE nature of the Lord's supper, so far as it is expressed by the names applied to it in Scripture, has already been the subject of remark. Additional information, on this interesting subject, may be derived from an attentive consideration of the signs, and form of administration, used in this ordinance; which will also prepare the way to notice some of the corruptions of the Church of Rome, as well as

to place the doctrine of Christ's presence in the supper, in a scriptural point of view.

It has already been stated,* that a sacrament is an external sign of an invisible grace. Both are necessary to constitute a sacrament. We have found this to be the case with baptism, in which, pure water is the sign; and the righteousness and grace of the Lord Jesus, purifying the subject from guilt and pollution, are the things signified. In the sacrament of the supper there are two signs, both referring directly to the mediatorial person and work of the Son of God. In the account of the institution of this ordinance, already noticed,† we discovered that *bread* and *wine* are the sacraments or signs to be employed in its administration. "Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to his disciples; saying, Take, eat: this is my body.—And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them; saying, Drink ye all of it."‡

Bread and wine, then, are the signs which our Saviour has appointed. These are the symbols of his body and blood in the ordinance of the supper.

The particular *quality* of the bread is immaterial; and the same is true in respect of the *colour* of the wine. Ordinary bread and wine, such as can be most conveniently obtained; and which, by their nutritive and exhilirating properties, are suitable to represent the spiritual refreshment, which the supper is designed to impart, completely answer the purpose.

---

* See Letter ii. † See Letter xiv. ‡ Mat. xxvi. 26, 27

As the supper was instituted immediately after the celebration of the passover, there can be no doubt, but Christ, on that occasion, made use of what was left of the paschal feast; that is, of unleavened bread, and such wine as then remained on the table. It has been asserted, that this wine was red, and diluted with water. Whether this assertion be correct or not, we conceive to be of little importance. The *circumstances*, connected with the institution of the supper, show, that all those peculiarities do not enter into the nature of the ordinance; and that such bread and wine as are in ordinary use, and can be most conveniently obtained, are proper to be employed in the commemoration of the Saviour's death, as symbols of his broken body, and shed blood.

Witsius justly remarks,* "For every thing that Christ did, according to the custom of his nation, and on occasion of the passover, does not belong to the essence of the sacrament; nor has a mystical signification; nor, in all its circumstances, obtains the force of a perpetual law."

Bread and wine, then, without any superstitious substitute or admixtures, are the sacramental *elements*.

The sacramental *actions* and *words* are also entitled to notice in this place. These may be classed under two heads; viz. the *consecration*, and the *distribution* of the elements.

1. The consecration of the elements.—Our Sa-

* Vol. iii. 424.

viour took bread, and blessed it; and afterwards he took the cup, and gave thanks. His example therefore binds his servants, ministering in his name—by solemn prayer and thanksgiving, to consecrate, or set apart from a common to a holy use, so much of the bread and wine as may be needed on the occasion. That, being *sanctified by the word of God and prayer*,* they may have a special relation to the body and blood of the Lord Jesus, of which they are the divinely appointed symbols. By this act of consecration, we acknowledge that the elements undergo a certain change. It is however only relative or sacramental, as we have just stated, and altogether different from that for which Papists contend, as we shall presently show. Scripture teaches that the elements remain bread and wine, after the consecration. 1 Cor. xi. 26.

2. The *distribution* of the elements is to follow their consecration. Our Saviour, when he had blessed the bread, *brake* it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take, eat; this is my body which is broken for you:" And so with regard to the cup also, after giving thanks, he gave it to his disciples, saying, drink ye all of it: For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." Agreeably to this rule, the minister of the gospel officiating in the name of his Master, must brake the bread, to represent the "wounding and bruising" of Christ's body. "The bread which we break," says Paul.

* Isa. liii. 5.

The broken bread is, then, to be given to the communicants, as *the communion of the body of Christ.** After which, the wine having been poured out, is to be given to them, as *the communion of the blood of Christ.*†

This is the order to be observed in the administration of the Lord's supper; and in this way "Jesus Christ is evidently set forth crucified *among* us,"‡ as well as crucified *for* us. The affecting scene of Golgotha is brought to view; and the crucified, bleeding, dying victim, is set before our eyes!

> "Believers, now behold the man!
> The man of grief! condemned for you:
> The Lamb of God, for sinners slain,
> Weeping, to Calvary pursue!"

From this view of the subject, which, we feel confident, is according to the mind of Christ, and the order of the primitive church; you cannot but be filled with astonishment, and regret, at the corruptions and abominations introduced by the Church of Rome, in relation to this ordinance.

The doctrines of *transubstantiation*, and the *mass* —for they are inseparably connected—are, as Mosheim justly remarks, when speaking of the former, "the most monstrous doctrines, that the phrenzy of superstition was capable of inventing!"§ And as the *man of sin* may yet display his power on this side of the Atlantic, before the reign of truth and righteousness shall be completely established, it may

* 1 Cor. x. 16. † Form for admin. of supper. ‡ Gal. iii. 1.
§ Ecc. His. vol. iii. 296.

not be improper to make a few remarks in relation to these "monstrous" errors.

By *transubstantiation* is meant, a real change of the bread and wine, into the body and blood of Christ, effected by the act of consecration,—or, to use the words of Bellarmine, one of their celebrated writers: "The meaning of Christ's words "*This is my body*, is this: What is contained in these species, or appearances of bread and wine, is really and properly my very, true, and natural body!"*

According to this, the same body, which was mangled and torn on the cross, is again broken: and the same blood, which stained Mount Calvary, is again shed, whenever this ordinance is celebrated. And as the sacrifice of Christ on the cross is, in Scripture, declared to be effectual to cleanse from all sin;† so the Papists ascribe efficacy to the daily offering up of Christ in the mass;—an efficacy, which is not confined to the living; but which is even effectual to release the dead from the torments of purgatory! Yea, further; they assert, that as Christ's body and blood are truly exhibited, and li-

* The doctrine of *consubstantiation*, for which Luther contended, is but one remove from this error, inasmuch as it maintains the real presence of Christ *under* the emblems of bread and wine! In this point more than any other, perhaps, Luther fell short of what the state of the church at that time required, in the work of reformation. But Luther was a man; and a man who did wonders. There is more cause to be astonished that he did so much, than to wonder that he did not accomplish more.

† 1 John i.

terally offered, in the celebration of the mass, it is the duty of all to pay religious worship to the appearance of bread and wine; which, say they, are in reality the body and blood of the Saviour!—But we will give you their own account of this impious absurdity: "The mass is that holy service, in which, a lawfully ordained priest, by pronouncing, in a low tone of voice, these five words 'Hoc enim est corpus meum,' [for this is my body,] creates of bread Christ Jesus; and offers him to God, the Father, as a sacrifice, to atone for the sins of the living and the dead."

In the true spirit of this definition, the famous Council of Trent passed the following decrees,—viz.

"1. Whosoever shall deny, that there is offered to God in the mass a true and proper sacrifice—let him be accursed!

"2. Whosoever does not believe, that in these words 'Do this in remembrance of me,' Christ constituted his Apostles, and all their successors, to be properly and truly priests, to offer the body and blood of Christ—let him be accursed!

"3. If any man shall say, that the sacrifice of the mass is only *gratulatory*, and in commemoration of Christ, and not *propitiatory*; and that it only profiteth him who partakes thereof, and not the living and the dead;—let him be accursed!"

Here you have a view of the Popish doctrines of *transubstantiation* and *the mass*. At one glance you will perceive their *absurdity* and *impiety*.

For what can be more *absurd*, than that the bread and wine should be changed into the body and blood of Christ? Do not our very senses, which testify that, in the sacrament of baptism, the water is not changed into the blood of Christ—also testify, that the bread and the wine, used in the sacrament of the supper, remain substantially the same, after consecration, that they were before? Ah! but 'the substance is changed, while the appearance and properties remain unaltered.'

This is absurdity run mad! For by what do we know substances, but by their properties or accidents?—or what effects a change in substances, but a change of their properties? If a substance may be changed, without a change of accidents, then there is an end to all distinctions between objects of every description!

For instance: I take the liberty to tell you, that a clod of earth is an angel: And when you tell me, that its properties are those, which are peculiar to matter, and directly the opposite of those which belong to a spirit? I reply: True; but the substance is a spirit, although the properties are those of matter!

How ridiculous: Yes; and how anti-sacramental too; for this doctrine of the Church of Rome is inconsistent with the very nature of a sacrament. It destroys the sign—or, at least, identifies it with the thing signified. This is incompatible with the nature of a sacrament; which, as we have before sta-

ted, consists of two parts, an external sign or signs, of internal grace or blessings.

But, from the *absurdity* of transubstantiation, turn your attention for a moment to the *impiety* of the mass. We say the *impiety* of the mass; for the doctrine of the mass manifestly involves a denial of the atonement of Christ, and a positive vindication of the grossest idolatry! It teaches that, that *one offering of Christ, by which*, according to Paul, *he has forever perfected them that are sanctified*,* is not effectual to cleanse from sin, unless the offering be daily repeated in the sacrifice of the mass: And that, as the mass is a real offering of the body of Christ, the *adoration of the host* is a reasonable worship! The priest, by consecration, changes the elements into the body and blood of Christ; and then offers him up a sacrifice for sin. The communicant adores——then eats his Saviour! Our Catechism well describes the impiety of all this, when it declares, that "the mass at bottom is nothing else than a denial of the one sacrifice, and sufferings of Jesus Christ, and an accursed idolatry!"†

But, some may enquire, 'How are we to understand the expressions of the Saviour 'This is my body—this is my blood?' I reply, we are to understand them, according to the established laws of sacramental phraseology. When circumcision is called the covenant,‡ we all understand, that it was a *sign* of the covenant. When Paul says, "The Rock

* Heb. x. 14. † Heid. Cat. sect. xxx. Quest. 80.
‡ Gen. xvii. 10.

was Christ,"* we readily perceive his meaning to be, that the rock prefigured, or signified Christ. The Jews were familiar with this mode of expression; and probably, as Witsius† intimates, the very expression of our Saviour was borrowed from their paschal phrases. "For when the Israelites did eat their paschal bread, they were wont to say, *This is that bread of affliction, which our fathers did eat in the land of Egypt.* And what seems to come nearer the purpose, they called the *roasted lamb*, which was served up in the paschal supper, *the body of the passover.* But no one understood, or even could understand it otherwise, but that the bread, which they yearly eat on the festival day, was a symbol and memorial of that bread which their ancestors were formerly fed with in Egypt."

In this same sense, the bread and the wine, used in the supper, are called the body and blood of Christ. They are the *appointed signs or symbols of his body and blood.* In justification of this phraseology, our Catechism‡ assigns the following reasons, which, I presume, you will deem satisfactory. "Christ speaks thus, not without great reason—namely, not only thereby to teach us, that as bread and wine support this temporal life, so his crucified body, and shed blood, are the true meat and drink, whereby our souls are fed to eternal life; but more especially, by these visible signs and pledges, to assure us, that we are real partakers of his true body

* 1 Cor. x. 4. † Vol. iii. p. 429. § xix.
‡ Sect. xxix. Quest. 79.

and blood (by the operation of the Holy Ghost,) as we receive by the mouths of our bodies these holy signs in remembrance of him; and that all his sufferings and obedience are as certainly ours, as if we had, in our own persons, suffered, and made satisfaction for our sins to God."

But this leads to another question, proper to be noticed here. 'Notwithstanding the elements are not changed into the body and blood of Christ—are we not to understand and believe, that he is, in some sense, present at the administration of the ordinance, in which his death is commemorated?' Most assuredly. Christ has promised to be with his church and people *always, even unto the end of the world.** And although, "with respect to his human nature, he is no more on earth; with respect to his Godhead, majesty, grace, and spirit, he is at no time absent from us."† While the human nature of Christ is confined to heaven, his Divine nature is essentially present, at all times, in all places. Wherever his dying institution is observed, he, as a Divine person, is *verily in that place.*

Christ is also sacramentally present in the celebration of this ordinance. The elements exhibit him to our view: His sufferings and death are placed before us: He is symbolically present at the celebration of his death.

But, what is most comfortable to be known, Christ is present in the celebration of the supper by his grace and spirit, comforting the hearts of his

* Mat. xxviii. 20. † Heid. Cat. Quest. 47.

people; reviving their languishing graces; and causing them, by faith, *to eat his body, which is meat indeed; and drink his blood, which is drink indeed.* Ah! did not the believer find at the table, *him whom his soul loveth!* it would be an unprofitable and an unmeaning ceremony. Saviour, thy people wish thee near! It is the presence of the *Master of the feast* that gives life and efficacy to the ordinance, which the Christian delights to celebrate. "He brought me to the banqueting-house; and his banner over me was love."*

This convinces the believer that his Redeemer is present. He enjoys his presence: "He tastes and sees that the Lord is good."† He holds communion with him, as a *present* friend; receives from him the evidence of his *personal interest*, in the provisions and benefits of the everlasting covenant; and the pledges of an unending fellowship in the world of glory, where the redeemed of all ages shall, in full view of their glorious Head, celebrate the *marriage supper of the Lamb.*

That every returning communion may bring to your such blessedness, is my earnest prayer!

---

* Cant. ii. 4. † Ps. xxxiv. 8.

LETTER XVII.

Design of the supper—Not to atone for sin, but to commemorate the death of Christ—to seal the blessings of the covenant—to strengthen the faith, and animate the hopes of believers—and to promote the exercise of brotherly affection.

BELOVED PEOPLE,

I TRUST, that the two preceding letters have given you satisfactory information, concerning the *nature* of the Lord's supper; and that we are now prepared to take a view of its *design*—or, in other words, *the purposes, it is intended to answer*, in the Christian church.

You have already been cautioned* against the impious doctrine of the Church of Rome, which represents this ordinance as a *repeated* sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ, offered up by the priest, to make atonement for the sins of both the living and the dead! Scripture is so full and explicit in declaring the PERFECTION† of the offering of Christ, and that it is never to be succeeded by *any other offering for sin*,‡ that nothing appears necessary, in addition to what has already been stated, to guard you against this error.

There is, however, another error, somewhat allied to this, which prevails in a greater or less degree in

* Letter xvi.

† Heb. ix. 11, 12, 14, 15, 25, 26, and x. 10, 11, 12, 14.

‡ Heb. x. 28, 27.

the churches of the Reformation, against which it may be proper and useful to guard you. While too many undervalue, and even despise this holy institution, it is to be feared, that there are not a few who run to the opposite extreme, and attach a superstitious and unscriptural importance to it,—as though the ordinance possessed some secret and undefined virtue, securing the pardon of sin to all who partake of it—or, as though the act of communing were so highly meritorious, as to lay God under obligations to be favourable to every recipient. All the institutions of Jehovah are important; and no duty is more clearly stated than that which requires us to commemorate the Saviour's death in the sacrament of the supper.

But we may well be cautious, how we ascribe to any institution of the Head of the Church, or to any service of our own, a virtue or merit, which must forever rest exclusively in the obedience and death of the Lord Jesus Christ. To imagine that attendance on the sacrament of the supper will take away sin, and merit heaven, is to insult the Saviour—to undervalue his sacrifice—and to substitute a new foundation of our hope!

Such however is the fact, that too many imagine that the solemnity of the communion Sabbath wipes away all their guilt—cancels all their debts—and secures to them an incontrovertible claim on the favour of their Judge! How many consider their accounts as fairly balanced, when they have taken the sacrament; and that their heaven will be sure if, on

the bed of death, and as the last act of life, the ordinance is administered to them!

All this is very improper. It is unscriptural, and of most dangerous tendency, inasmuch as it draws off the sinner's dependance from the sure and only foundation laid in Zion,* and places it on the virtue of an institution, or the meritorious act of the creature; both of which are false and sandy foundations. The sacrament of the supper was not designed to take away our sin; nor was it ever contemplated by the Master of the feast, that our attendance on it should merit the crown of righteousness.

Having taken this negative view of the subject, and stated what is *not the design* of this ordinance, we are better prepared to exhibit, for your consideration, the *purposes* it is intended to answer.

1. The first and grand design, as stated in the words of the institution, *is the commemoration of the sufferings and death of the Lord Jesus Christ, our precious and only Saviour.* "This do in remembrance of me."† "For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come."‡

The supper is a *commemorative* ordinance. In the celebration of which, the *broken bread*, and the *poured out wine*, strikingly represent the wounding of Christ's body, and the shedding of his blood, as the price of his people's redemption. The scenes of Gethsemane and Golgotha are affectingly re-exhibited; and the recollection of Christ's passion is

* Isa. xxviii. 16. † Luke xxii. 19. ‡ 1 Cor. xi. 26.

powerfully revived. The church SHEWS the death of her Lord—and perpetuates the remembrance of her heavenly Benefactor; who, though no longer present on earth, is still mindful of his people, pleading their cause before his Father's throne, and preparing mansions for their everlasting residence, *that where he is, there they may also be.*

This, then, is the first design—to commemorate the sufferings and death of the "good Shepherd, who laid down his life for the sheep."

2. The second design is *to seal to believers the benefits of the covenant of grace.* The sacrament of the supper, as well as baptism, is a *sealing* ordinance; and, like baptism, it seals the righteousness and grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, in covenant form, to the believer. "The Lord's supper testifies to us, that we have a full pardon of all sin, by the only sacrifice of Jesus Christ, which he himself has once accomplished on the cross; and that we, by the Holy Ghost, are ingrafted into Christ, who, according to his human nature, is now not on earth, but in heaven, at the right hand of God, his Father, and will there be worshipped by us."*

1. "The supper testifies and seals to believers the forgiveness of sin, through the imputed righteousness of the Lord Jesus." That all who believe have complete forgiveness, in virtue of the sacrifice of Christ, is a truth, so legibly recorded in the word of God, that he who runs may read. The Apostle Paul's doctrine is clearly expressed:† "Be it

* Heid. Cat. Quest. 80.

† Acts xiii. 39. 40.

known unto you, therefore, men and brethren, that through this man [Christ Jesus] is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses." And, again: "But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God, which is by faith of Jesus Christ *unto all, and upon all them that believe.**

All this is testified to the believer in the supper; which was instituted, among others, for this express purpose, that it might signify and seal to the people of God their interest in the blessings, which Christ has purchased for them—"and that all his sufferings and obedience are as certainly *theirs*, as if *they* had in *their* own persons suffered, and made satisfaction for *their* sins to God."†

2. "The sacrament of the supper testifies, that we, by the Holy Ghost, are ingrafted into Christ;" and thus seals our union and communion with him.

In the administration of this ordinance, by the ministers of the gospel, according to the direction and example of their Master, Christ is visibly made over in all his fulness to the believing recipient—to be his Saviour; and, in due time, to put him in full possession of all the benefits of his mediation; while the believer also, in receiving the elements, sets to his seal that God is true, and that he cordially re-

* Rom. iii. 21, 22. † Heid. Cat. Quest. 79.

ceives the Lord Jesus Christ, represented by these elements, for all the purposes of his salvation. Thus, by faith, he eats the crucified body, and drinks the shed blood of Christ, and "becomes more and more united to his sacred body by the Holy Ghost, who dwells both in Christ and in believers: so that they, though Christ is in heaven, and they on earth, are notwithstanding *flesh of his flesh, and bone of his bone;** and that they live and are governed forever by one spirit, as members of the same body are by one soul.†

This is manifestly the doctrine of Paul:‡ "The cup of blessing, which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread, which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we, being many, are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread."

In this ordinance, then, the believer's personal interest in Christ is signified and sealed: His union and communion with Christ is certified; so that he can appropriate to himself what Christ has done and suffered for believers in general: and say, with Paul,◊ "He hath loved me, and given himself for me;" or, in the language of our Catechism,‖ "his body was offered and broken on the cross *for me*, and his blood shed *for me*, as certainly as I see with my eyes the bread of the Lord broken for me, and the cup communicated to me."

---

* Eph. v. 30. † Heid. Cat. Quest. 76. ‡ 1 Cor. x. 16, 17.
◊ Gal. ii. 20. ‖ Heid. Cat. Quest. 75.

3. The third design of this institution we shall mention, is *the spiritual nourishment, and growth in grace of the followers of the Lord Jesus.* The object of this ordinance is not to make the *first* communication of grace, by which the subject is regenerated, and made a new creature in Christ Jesus, although a sovereign God may occasionally employ it for that purpose. The sacrament of the supper presupposes the existence of grace in those who partake; and that they have examined themselves, and discovered comfortable evidence, that they are already in the faith:* And accordingly it only aims at giving additional vigour to spiritual life, previously imparted; and additional evidence and consolation to those who have before tasted that God is gracious.

The remark of Witsius is excellent:† "The supper seals to us the conservation and nourishment, the strength, and increase of spiritual life, which flow from Christ. As by the use of bread and wine he, who communicates, experiences his bodily strength renewed; so, at the same time, it is intimated to the believing soul, that he shall not want that grace of Christ, which *giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might increaseth strength.*"‡

The experience of many will support the assertion, that the believer is often sensibly refreshed and comforted at the Redeemer's table: Fed as with marrow and fatness; and strengthened with strength

* 2 Cor. xiii. 5. † Vol. iii. p. 444. ‡ Isa. xl. 29.

in the inner man: His graces are brought into livelier exercise. Faith is increased—hope is confirmed—love is ardent—joy is "unspeakable, and full of glory."

The communicant, having thus, by faith, feasted upon his Redeemer's body and blood, and drawn large supplies of grace out of his inexhaustible fulness, retires from the table; and says, with gratitude,

"'Tis a rich banquet I have had!
What will it be above?"

"Lord, evermore give us this bread!"*

Of this use of the supper, our Form, for its administration, makes explicit mention: "And as certainly feed and nourish your hungry and thirsty soul with my crucified body, and shed blood, to everlasting life, as this bread is broken before your eyes, and this cup is given to you; and you eat and drink the same, with your mouth, in remembrance of me."

4. The fourth and last object I shall mention, as designed to be answered by this sacrament, *is the cultivation of brotherly affection among the members of Christ's mystical body.* The company of believers, in the celebration of the supper, meet as children of the same family around the table of their common Lord,—as members of the same body, united to the same Head, and therefore as members also one of another. They hold communion with Christ; they hold communion with each other.

* Jo. vi. 34.

"Their hopes, their fears, their joys, are one." Oh! what a consideration to perpetuate among the body of Christ that sincere and tender affection, for which the primitive Christians were eminently distinguished. "See how these Christians love one another!" was an encomium which their very enemies were constrained to pass upon them. "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments. As the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: For there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore."*.

"Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God. He that loveth not, knoweth not God; for God is love. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another!"†

The sacrament of the supper is admirably calculated to secure the exercise of such excellent dispositions; and this, as *our Form* declares, is one of its professed designs: "Besides that we, by the same spirit, may also be united, as members of one body, in true brotherly love; as the holy Apostle saith, *For we, being many, are one bread, and one body; for we are all partakers of that one bread.* For as out of many grains one meal is ground, and one bread baked; and out of many berries, being press-

* Ps. cxxxiii.

† 1 Jo. v. 7, 8, 11.

ed together, one wine floweth, and mixeth itself together; so shall we all, who, by a true faith, are ingrafted into Christ, be altogether one body, through brotherly love, for Christ's sake, our beloved Saviour, who hath so exceedingly loved us: And not only shew this in word, but also in very deed towards one another."

Much to be pitied (we cannot help here remarking,) is the communicant, who comes to the table of the Lord with enmity, hatred, and malice, rankling in his heart! and not less to be pitied is that professor, who stays back from the table, because his conscience tells him that he indulges those angry and unforgiving feelings, which disqualify him for a place at the feast of love!

Thus have we taken a view of the important ends designed to be answered by the ordinance of the supper. The view we have taken, I am disposed to think, must have left on your minds a conviction of the propriety and necessity of its *repeated* administration. Baptism being an initiatory rite, and a sign of regeneration, ought to be but once administered. The repetition of it is highly improper. But the supper, being a commemorative and confirming ordinance, ought to be frequently dispensed. How often it shall be administered, must, in every church, be determined by the prudence and experience of those who are entrusted with its government. Not one, I presume, will undertake to say, that *quarterly communions* are too frequent, when, to the important ends designed to be answered by

this ordinance, he adds the consideration, that the Apostles and primitive Christians, on the return of every Lord's day, engaged in this holy solemnity.

That all the important ends designed to be answered by this institution may be realized among us, is my ardent desire at the throne of God!

LETTER XVIII.

Qualifications for the supper—Assent to the doctrines of the church, one of the terms of communion—Nature of an acceptable approach to the table of the Lord.

BELOVED PEOPLE,

THE Apostle Paul, in speaking of the sacrament of the supper, has given the following direction:* "But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup."

This direction plainly implies, that certain *qualifications* are necessary, to render our approach to the table of the Lord, acceptable to him, and profitable to ourselves. We propose, therefore, in this letter, to enquire, *what these qualifications are? and to make some additional remarks, immediately connected with the subject.*

---

* 1 Cor. xi. 28.

The doctrine of *preparation* for the holy solemnity of the communion is certainly of great importance; and ought to be better understood, than it appears to be, even by the body of professors.

The disposition to cleave to self-righteousness, and depend on our own goodness, is natural to us all; and displays itself, in no instance, perhaps, more fully than in relation to the ordinance of which we are speaking. We wish to discover our *right* to the table of the Lord in ourselves, instead of finding it in Christ! and we look to our own *doings*, instead of depending on his *righteousness*, to secure to us a gracious reception at the sacred feast.

This is all wrong—entirely wrong; and directly contrary to the genius of the gospel. The gospel offers heaven itself "without money, and without price;" and surely it does not require us to purchase, by our personal merits, a place at the Redeemer's table. The gospel proposes every thing to the sinner, through the mediation of the Lord Jesus—and considers no title to any favour or blessing valid, unless derived from Christ. An interest in the merits of the Son of God, delivers us from condemnation; secures to us the approbation of heaven; confers on us a valid title to the glories of eternity: And this, and this alone, can give us a right to the ordinance of the supper.

To be acceptable guests at the marriage-supper, we must appear there *in the righteousness of Christ, as our wedding-garment;** and prove ourselves to be

* Mat. xxii. 11, 12.

the "true circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh."*

The remark of Calvin† is excellent: "Needy, and destitute of every good, defiled with the pollution of sin, and half dead, how could we worthily eat the Lord's body? We shall rather consider, that we come as paupers to the liberal Benefactor, as patients to the Physician—as sinners to the Author of righteousness—as persons dead to the Fountain of life: That the worthiness which is required of God, consists principally in faith, which attributes every thing to Christ, and places no dependence on ourselves; and, secondly, in charity, even that charity which it is enough for us to present to God in an imperfect state, that he may increase and improve it; for we cannot produce it in a state of perfection."

Union to the Lord Jesus Christ, interesting us in his righteousness and grace, is the grand qualification for an acceptable, and profitable approach to the table of the Lord. An examination into our prevailing dispositions and practice is necessary, not to find in them our *right* to the ordinance; but to discover in them *evidence* of the fact, that we belong to Christ—that we are the adopted children of God; and therefore have a right to the children's bread.

The points, on which we are particularly to examine ourselves, in order to judge correctly of our

---

* Phil. iii. 3.

† Inst. vol. iii. p. 448.

qualifications for the ordinance under consideration, we conceive to be the following; viz.

1. We are to examine ourselves on the subject of *Christian knowledge*, whether our minds have been enlightened by the word and Spirit of God. Such as are grossly ignorant, either in consequence of natural imbecility of mind, or a wilful neglect of the means of instruction, are certainly not prepared to take a seat at the Redeemer's table: They are utterly unable to "discern the Lord's body;" and by partaking become "guilty of the body and blood of the Lord."

Knowledge is necessary to the exercise of every grace, and the right performance of every duty. We must serve God with the *understanding*, as well as with the *heart*. And to approach the table of the Lord acceptably, we must be acquainted, in some good degree, with *ourselves*, our guilt, our impotence, our wants, and our misery; with the *covenant of grace*, its free and ample provisions, its precious promises, and its unalterable stability, *ordered in all things, and sure*;*—with the *person, offices, and work of the Mediator of the Covenant*, who is, in one person, very God, and very man; who is the Prophet, Priest, and King of the Church; and who having, by his obedience unto death, made atonement for the sins of his people, now reigns for their benefit, and in fulfilment of eternal stipulations, demands their salvation:†—with the *nature, use, and design of the sacrament of the supper*, so as to be able to

* 2 Sam. xxiii. 5.

† Jo. xvii. 24.

"discern the Lord's body" in that holy ordinance. And finally, with the *interest*, which faith humbly claims in God, as the God of the covenant, and all the abundance of that goodness which Christ has purchased for his people; as well as the unreserved *consecration* which faith makes at the Redeemer's table, to be the Lord's entirely and forever.

2. The second qualification we mention is *faith, precious faith.* "Without faith," the Scriptures tell us, "it is impossible to please God."* The direction of the Apostle is, "Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith."† The unbeliever cannot acceptably approach the table of communion; he has not an interest in the righteousness of Christ, which alone can constitute us welcome guests Neither can the ordinance prove profitable to such an one; because he is utterly unable, in the act of communicating, to pass through the elements, and feed upon the crucified body and shed blood of the Redeemer, for the nourishment of his soul.

It is this grace, which gives the soul a holy liberty, and an indescribable delight, in the commemoration of the Saviour's death. In its proper exercise, it receives the Redeemer in all the discoveries made of him in his word, and feeds upon all that fulness of spiritual good exhibited in the promises: And in its appropriating act, it exclaims, with holy triumph, "My beloved is mine, and I am his!"‡ "Who loved me, and gave himself for me!"§

* Heb. xi. 6. † 2 Cor. xiii. 5. ‡ Cant. ii. 10
§ Gal. ii. 20.

3. A third qualification we mention is *sincere and genuine repentance.* Faith and repentance are inseparably connected; and, as an old writer beautifully observes, "the tear which repentance sheds, drops from the eye of faith." "They shall *look* on him whom they have pierced, and mourn as for an only son, and be in bitterness as for a first-born."*

Nothing more effectually softens the heart—nothing more completely fills it with ingenuous sorrow for sin—than believing views of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the method of salvation through him. And this is a very proper exercise when we come to seal our interest in his righteousness, and to tell the church, and the world, that he is our Saviour!

Yes, brethren; a knowledge of our sins, in their evil nature—in their aggravating circumstances, and their awful demerit—together with that sincere contrition, with which such knowledge is calculated to fill the soul—is a very necessary qualification in our approaches to the Redeemer's table. "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise."†

That very sense of unworthiness, which many plead as an excuse for their neglect of this sacred institution, we consider a necessary preparation. "We are never more fit (says Willison‡) for this holy table, than when we are most humbled, and most ashamed of ourselves, because of our unfitness for this solemn approach; and we are never less fit than when we think ourselves most fit and prepared

* Zech. xii. 10. † Ps. li. 17. ‡ Intro. to Sac. Med. p. 5.

for the duty." The proud, self-righteous Pharisee, has no right at the communion table; but the humble Publican, whose heart is broken *for* sin, and *from* sin, may come, and welcome. The promise to Zion is "I will abundantly bless her provision; I will satisfy her poor with bread."* And many of the sons and daughters of Zion can join in the song of Mary: "He hath filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he hath sent empty away."†

4. The fourth qualification we mention is *love.* The natural heart is full of enmity;‡ and before we can come to the feast of love acceptably, the enmity of the carnal mind must have been destroyed, and the love of God and man shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost.

The death of the Lord Jesus was the most astonishing exhibition of love, that either earth or heaven ever witnessed; and the constraining influence of a Saviour's love must be felt in the commemoration of a Saviour's death.

"Love is the fulfilling of the law." The first table requires us to love God supremely.◊ This is perfectly reasonable. God is the most excellent of all beings! and his uncreated perfections justly entitle him to the supreme love—the most profound reverence—the most exalted adoration—the most unshaken confidence—and the best services of all intelligent creatures. But the Apostle John‖ remarks, "we love him, because he first loved us!"

* Ps. cxxxii. 15. † Luke i. 53. ‡ Rom. viii. 7.
◊ Mat. xxii. 39. ‖ 1 Epist. iv. 19.

A lively conviction of his relative goodness, as well as of his absolute perfection, must win the heart. This God, who is the Creator and Preserver of all, is by covenant the believer's God *forever and ever:* His Father, his Redeemer, and his Sanctifier. The object of his supreme affection, in whose government he rejoices—in whose salvation he glories—to whose honour he is devoted: "Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion forever."* "He is the chiefest among ten thousand; yea, he is altogether lovely."†

With the love of God, the love of man is connected; and the second table of the moral law requires us "to love our neighbour as ourselves."‡ The love of *benevolence* is to be exercised to all, even the most worthless and unfriendly. We are to be prompt to forgive them—to assist them—and to pray for them. The command of the Saviour is "Love your enemies; bless them that curse you; do good to them that hate you; and pray for them that despitefully use you, and persecute you!"§

But the *saints are the excellent ones of the earth,* in whom is the believer's delight. These he loves with a love of *complacency:* He discovers in them the image of his Saviour: He meets them at the communion table, as members of the same family; and in the love he bears them, he finds evidence

* Ps. lxxiii. 25, 26. † Cant. v. 10, 16. ‡ Mat. xxii. 39.
§ Mat. v. 44.

that he is born of God,* and has a right to the table of the Lord.

5. The fifth and last qualification we shall mention, *is a sincere and ardent desire to meet the Saviour at his table; and to be refreshed by his grace, for all the purposes of new and holy obedience.* The true communicant is far from being satisfied with his present attainments in the divine life: his desire is *to grow in grace and in knowledge;* and, by holy resemblances, *to put on the Lord Jesus Christ* from day to day. Conscious of his weakness, and of his numerous deficiencies in duty, he is ardently desirous to meet his Saviour at the board, that he may there renew his strength, and receive out of the fulness treasured up in Christ, *and grace for grace!* With fixed determination to walk in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless—to esteem all God's precepts concerning all things to be right—and to hate every false way—he approaches the table of the Lord. "I will wash mine hands in innocency, so will I compass thine altar, O Lord!"† "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled."‡

These are the qualifications which Scripture insists on, as necessary to constitute us worthy partakers of this heavenly meat and drink; and are thus stated in the Westminster Shorter Catechism§ "It is required of them that would worthily partake of the Lord's supper, that they examine themselves

* Jo. iv. 7. † Ps. xxvi. 6. ‡ Mat. v. 6.
§ Quest. 97.

of their *knowledge* to discern the Lord's body—of their *faith* to feed upon him—of their *repentance*, *love*, and *new obedience;* lest, coming unworthily, they eat and drink judgment to themselves."

All who are possessed of these qualifications, are to consider it their sacred duty, and their exalted privilege, *to confess Christ before men*, and to hold communion with him and his people, over the memorials of his body and blood. For this purpose they are to present the evidence of their qualifications, to the officers of such church, as shall to them appear most conformable in doctrine and government to the word of God. In this country every one is left at full liberty to make choice of his own church; and no serious and candid man would wish to belong to a church, the doctrines and discipline of which he cannot approve. In such a church he never could feel at home, nor worship God with a contented mind.

The reception of members, in full communion, is a duty of the highest moment, and intimately connected with the peace and prosperity of the church. Every church has a right to fix her own terms of communion; and the standards which she has adopted must necessarily form a part of those terms of communion. No church can have a rational prospect of peace and prosperity, in which an attempt is made to herd together men of conflicting sentiments on the great truths of revelation! In such a church, instead of the communion of the saints, discord must prevail. "How can two walk together, except

they be agreed?" And the officers of a church are exceedingly wanting in faithfulness to themselves and the church, if they admit to their communion any who do not cordially subscribe to their established standards.

The standards of our church, as has been repeatedly stated, are the Belgic confession of faith—the Heidelbergh Catechism—and the canons of the Synod of Dort; and whatever imposing appearances of piety might be exhibited by the person making application for a seat at the Redeemer's table, ignorance of, or opposition to the doctrines expressed in the standards, ought ever to be viewed as an insuperable objection to his admission. The officers of Christ's church are, in their court capacity, bound to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints, as much as individual believers can possibly be. If our standards speak truth, we are unfaithful to the truth, if we admit to our communion persons who oppose these standards: They have no business among us: Let them go where they can enjoy their sentiments, without disturbing the peace of the church.

We would, therefore, honestly contend, that, in addition to hopeful appearances of piety, no one can be admitted as a communicant in our church, who does not understand, and profess to believe the *doctrines of grace*, as taught in our standards. If a man, who is an heretic, ought, after a first and second admonition, to be rejected—such an one, certainly, ought not to be admitted.

In our "form for the administration of baptism to adults," the candidate, after having given satisfactory evidence of his knowledge, faith, and piety, to the officers of the church, is required publicly to assent to the doctrines of the church, by giving an affirmative answer to the following question; viz. "Dost thou assent to all the articles of the Christian religion as they are taught here in this Christian church, according to the word of God, and purpose stedfastly to continue in the same doctrine to the end of thy life: And also dost thou reject all heresies and schisms, repugnant to this doctrine, and promise to persevere in the communion of our Christian church, not only in the hearing of the word, but also in the use of the Lord's supper?"*

This is perfectly proper; and the only way to preserve peace and purity in the church. Want of attention to this has already filled some of our churches with discord—and rendered it rather unsafe for some of our ministers to preach, in their own pulpits, the doctrines of their own church!

Neither will the evil end here, unless strict and immediate attention be paid to the subject, in the reception of members. In the Dutch Church, where the eldership is continually changing, and where almost every male member expects some time or other to fill that office, attention to this is of vital importance. The business of the Elders, as stated in the "form of ordination," is, among other things, to "have regard to the doctrine and conversation of

* Quest. 4.

the ministers of the word—that no strange doctrine be taught, &c." Now, admit ignorant and unsound members: After a few years, elect and ordain them to the office of Elders; and set these men to guard the doctrines advanced from the pulpit!—What a sad state of things! Let us see to it, that it is never exemplified among us.

But enough of this. We promised, in the title prefixed to this letter, to make some remarks on the *nature of an acceptable approach* to the table of the Lord; for it is not impossible, that a communicant, possessing all the qualifications of which we have spoken, may be guilty of eating and drinking unworthily, because at the time of communing his graces are not in proper and lively exercise. Upon this point, however, it will not be necessary to dwell. I will only observe, that the qualifications we have specified, brought into vigorous exercise at the time of communicating, will render our approach to the table acceptable to God, and profitable to ourselves. If the mind be purified from error and superstition, so that we are enabled to "discern the Lord's body; if faith, in lively exercise, leans upon the Beloved, and feeds upon him in all his offices and benefits; if deep humility and godly sorrow for sin are felt; if love "rises to an ardent flame,' and the soul is carried out to Christ, and his people, in holy affection; if resolutions of sincere and universal obedience, and greater faithfulness, in the covenant of our God, are solemnly formed; we shall, no

doubt, receive the cheering welcome, "Come eat of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled."*

"If we would communicate worthily, we must be earnest, not only for the life of grace, but also for the liveliness of grace; not only for the truth and sincerity of grace, but likewise for the activity and vigorous exercise of grace. So that a believer himself doth not eat and drink worthily, unless the grace that is in him be excited and exercised at this ordinance. There must be not only faith in the truth of it; but there must be faith realizing, applying, appropriating, and making use of Christ's death and purchase, in this ordinance. Not only must there be a disposition of soul to be humbled for sin, but there must be actual mourning and melting of heart for sin, and for particular sins, when we look on him whom we have pierced by them. Not only must there be a principle of love to Christ; but also an exciting of love to flame out to Christ, who loved us, and gave himself for us."†

"Three things (says the excellent John Brown of Haddington,‡) are necessary to a right partaking of the Lord's supper: 1. A worthy *state* of union with Christ, as our husband, father, righteousness, and strength. 2. A worthy *frame* in the actual exercise of all the graces of the Spirit, knowledge, faith, repentance, love, &c. 4. A worthy *end* of

* Prov. ix. 5. † Willison's Intro. to Sac. Med. p. 4.
‡ Body of Div. p. 522.

honouring Christ, glorifying God, and receiving spiritual nourishment to our soul."

All this is briefly expressed in our "form for the administration of this ordinance."—"The true examination of ourselves consists in these three parts:

1st. "That every one consider by himself his sins, and the curse due to him for them, to the end that he may abhor and humble himself before God; considering that the wrath of God against sin is so great, that (rather than that it should go unpunished,) he hath punished the same in his beloved Son, Jesus Christ, with the bitter and shameful death of the cross!

2ndly. "That every one examine his own heart, whether he doth believe this faithful promise of God, that all his sins are forgiven him, only for the sake of the passion and death of Jesus Christ; and that the perfect righteousness of Christ is imputed, and freely given him as his own; yea, so perfectly, as if he had satisfied, in his own person, for all his sins, and fulfilled all righteousness.

3dly. "That every one examine his own conscience, whether he purposeth henceforth to shew true thankfulness to God in his whole life, and to walk uprightly before him: As also, whether he hath laid aside unfeignedly all enmity, hatred, and envy, and doth firmly resolve henceforward to walk in true love and peace with his neighbour."

"All those then, who are thus disposed, God will certainly receive in mercy, and count them worthy partakers of the table of his Son, Jesus Christ!"

That you may find acceptance, comfort, and refreshment, at the table of the Lord, is the sincere prayer of your friend and pastor!

LETTER XIX.

Engagements made at the Redeemer's table—Unfaithfulness of professors—Exhortation to universal and holy obedience, with a few directions.

BELOVED PEOPLE,

It has already been stated,* that baptism, and the Lord's supper, are called *sacraments*, because they bind all who partake of them, under the solemnity of an oath, to be faithful to the Master, and the cause of the church. We have also noticed the engagements† made by parents, when they offer up their children to God in baptism. It may now be proper and useful to spend a few moments in considering *what are the special engagements, made by the professors of religion, when commemorating, in the sacrament of the supper, the death of their Lord?*

In all covenants there must be contracting parties, and reciprocal engagements. In the covenant of grace, God freely engages to become our God and portion forever, through the mediation of his beloved Son; and we, in embracing the covenant, engage

* Let. ii. † Let. xi.

to be the Lord's entirely and forever. Of these mutual engagements, the sacrament of the supper is a visible confirmation. The unchangeable love of God to the believer; and the unreserved consecration of the believer to the Lord, are both solemnly sealed. The whole transaction is well described in the address which Moses, on an interesting occasion, delivered to the children of Israel:* "Thou hast avouched the Lord, this day, to be thy God, and to walk in his ways, and to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and to hearken unto his voice: And the Lord hath avouched thee, this day, to be his peculiar people, as he hath promised thee, and that thou shouldest keep all his commandments."

According to the inspired statement of the Lawgiver of Israel, we, in the public ratification of our covenant with God, declare ourselves to be his, and solemnly pledge ourselves to glorify his name, by living according to the directions of his word, and according to the dictates of a conscience enlightened by his word and Spirit. "We avouch the Lord to be our God, and to walk in his ways, and to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and to hearken unto his voice."

The Bible is the believer's law-book: And he has engaged, at the Redeemer's table, to make it *a lamp to his feet, and a light to his path*—to embrace its truths, and to practice its duties. David was conscious that he had made engagements like these,

* Deut. xxvi. 17, 18.

in the use of the sealing ordinances of his day:* "I have sworn, (says he,) and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgments."

These general remarks have prepared the way for the following specification of the engagements made by believers in the sacrament of the supper.

1. In this ordinance the believer has engaged *to be the Lord's—to love him supremely—and to be entirely devoted to his glory.* Over the consecrated symbols of his Saviour's body and blood, he has publicly assented to the doctrine of the Apostle: "For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself: for whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: Whether we live, therefore, or die, we are the Lord's."† "And ye are not your own: For ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."‡

The glorious perfections of God's nature, as well as his relative goodness, demand that he should have the first and highest place in our affections; that every idol should be dethroned; that we should be delivered from every degrading and polluting attachment; and that we should "love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, and with all our strength."§

"Thou shalt have no other gods before me,"‖ is the first precept of the moral law. "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If

* Ps. cxix. 106. † Rom. xiv. 7, 8. ‡ 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20.
§ Mat. xxii. 37. ‖ Exo. xx. 3.

any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him," is the caution of the inspired Apostle.* "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth," is the direction of Paul.† While the pious Asaph, by his own example, instructs us to say, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee. My flesh and my heart faileth; but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion forever."‡

For the performance of all this, the believer has, by oath, bound himself, at the Redeemer's table. He has engaged to *delight himself in the Lord;* and to write "holiness to the Lord" upon his person, and his practice.

2. The believer has, at the sacramental board, *engaged to honour Jesus Christ as the Mediator of the covenant, and the glorified Head of the universe.* To believe in Jesus Christ is the leading direction of the gospel; and to live by faith on Jesus Christ is the great duty, and privilege of the Christian. As Christ is possessed of all fulness, every want of the Christian may receive a liberal supply; and it is alike the duty and the interest of the believer to improve Christ in all his offices, and in all his fulness. "Christ is of God made to them who be-

* 1 Jo. ii. 15. † Col. iii. 1, 2.

‡ Ps. lxxiii. 25, 26.

lieve, wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption."*

The believer has taken Christ for all; and engaged to honour Christ by relying on him for all. Renouncing confidence in the flesh, he rejoices in Christ Jesus, as all his salvation, and all his desire. Under the sins, which he every day commits, he looks to Christ for pardon: Under the infirmities, which he every day deplores, he looks to Christ for strength. In every conflict with his spiritual adversaries, he relies on the "Captain of Salvation;" and in running *the race set before him, he looks to Jesus, the author and finisher of faith.*

"Christ is all, and in all."† The believing communicant has engaged to honour him as such; and faithfully to cleave to him, through evil report, and good report—in health, and in sickness—in life, and in death.

3. The believer, in the sacrament of the supper, has bound himself *to walk in all the ordinances of the Lord blameless—conscientiously to observe, and sacredly to improve, the various institutions of religion, to the glory of God, and his own spiritual improvement and consolation.* The means of grace are as useful in the work of sanctification, as they are in the work of conversion. The believer must *grow in grace and in knowledge;* and for this purpose he must "keep the Sabbaths, and reverence the sanctuary" of the Most High; He must daily "search

* 1 Cor. i. 30. † Col. iii. 11.

the Scriptures;" and he must "in every thing, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, make known his requests to God." He has not yet attained, neither is he already perfect; but his sacramental engagements bind him to follow after perfection, and, in the diligent use of the means of grace, *to press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God, in Christ Jesus.*

4. Finally; the believer has engaged, at the Redeemer's table, *to be faithful in the discharge of every duty, whether it relate to God, his neighbour, or himself.* The religion of the Lord Jesus Christ, which the believer publicly espouses in the communion service, is designed to improve the practice, by sanctifying the heart. "The grace of God, that bringeth salvation, teacheth us, that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour, Jesus Christ—who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works."*

Indeed the Bible is designed to make us useful, and comfortable, in all the diversified stations, relations, and circumstances of life. Its directions are wisely adapted to all. The reciprocal duties of husbands and wives, of parents and children, of masters and servants, of magistrates and subjects, and of ministers and people, are plainly stated, and

* Tit. ii. 11—14.

authoritatively enjoined; that, being faithful in their respective stations and callings, God may be glorified by all. "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; inasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."* "As he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation: Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy."†

All this, communicant, and much more than has been stated, you have engaged to do when you surrounded the Redeemer's table, and ratified your covenant with the God of our salvation. You have taken the *sacramentum*, the oath of fidelity, and *sworn to keep the righteous judgments of the Lord.*

But a painful reflection presents itself to the mind. These solemn engagements, entered into over the broken body and shed blood of the Saviour, we have too much reason to believe, are but seldom felt and fulfilled, with that interest and fidelity, which their serious and important nature so loudly demand. By too many, they are soon forgotten, and sadly violated. Yes; it is a lamentable fact, that not a few, whom we see at our "solemn feasts," give just cause for the reproof administered to unfaithful Ephraim and Judah: "Your goodness is as the morning cloud, and as the early dew, it goeth away."‡ What! to-day in the sanctuary, and at the communion table; and to-morrow immersed in the world, filled with its cares, yielding to its tempta-

* 1 Cor. xv. 58. † 1 Pet. i. 15, 16. ‡ Hosea vi. 4.

tions, and practising its sins? What! to-day at the table of the Redeemer; and to-morrow guilty of betraying him into the hands of his enemies? What! to-day with his people on the Mount, where they taste the sweets of his communion; and to-morrow pursuing a course of conduct, which declares to all around that you "know not the Man?" —What dishonesty! What perfidy!

O! communicant, lay to heart the aggravated character of the sin of "lightly esteeming," and wantonly violating the covenant of our God! Call to mind the ingratitude, and the perjury, which marks the character of the faithless professor!

Neither is this a sin of such rare occurrence, as we might be induced to suppose, from a consideration of its heinous and aggravated nature. "They, like men, have transgressed the covenant: There have they dealt treacherously against me,"* is a charge which Jehovah may justly prefer against many individuals, and even churches, in our day. Unfaithfulness to God's covenant is a crying sin in the church of Christ; and in token of her humiliation on this account, Zion may well *gird herself with sackcloth, and sit in ashes.* "Surely, as a wife treacherously departeth from her husband, so have ye dealt treacherously with me, O house of Israel, saith the Lord."†

Suffer me, then, in the subsequent part of this paper, to suggest a few *considerations*, and *directions* for the conscientious fulfilment of the solemn

* Hos. vi. 7. † Jer. iii. 20.

engagements, into which you have entered at the Redeemer's table. And

1. I urge you to be faithful to your sacramental engagements, *by a regard for the glory of God, to which you profess to be supremely devoted.* The God, whom all intelligent creatures are bound to honour—and whom you have, at the communion table, claimed as your redeeming God—has taught us in his word, that he is glorified by the consistent and holy practice of his professed friends. "Herein," said our Saviour,* "is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit, so shall ye be my disciples."

The faithless, immoral professor, who from day to day violates the oath of fidelity, which he took at the Redeemer's table, disgraces his profession; and not only dishonours God himself, but tempts others to blaspheme his holy name! But the sincere Christian, who is stedfast in the covenant, and who exemplifies the power of divine grace in a life of holy obedience, honours both his profession and his God: "Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ unto the glory and praise of God."† "I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, and acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed, by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what

* Jo. xv. 8. † Phil. i. 11.

is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God."*

2. I urge you to be faithful in your profession, *from a regard for the cause of Christ, and the prosperity of his church.* Religion, it is true, ought not to be identified with its professors; nor subjected to the reproach and neglect of men, on account of the inconsistent conduct of such as lay claim to it. But we must be contented to take men and things as we find them. And the assertion is not to be controverted, that unfaithfulness and immorality, on the part of professors, will ever have the effect to prejudice men against the cause of Jesus Christ. The deepest wounds, inflicted on religion, are those with which she is wounded in the house of her friends! O! when shall the offence of the cross cease!—when shall this reproach of the church be wiped away!—when shall the consistent practice of professors make a true exhibition of our holy religion, and allure others to the obedience of faith!

O! If you love the cause of Christ, and long for its success, I besesch you, let your conduct be as becometh the gospel of Christ—"For so is the will of God, that, with well doing, ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men."† "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."‡

3. I urge you to be faithful to your covenant engagements, by a regard for *consisteney of character.*

* Rom. xii. 1, 2. † 1 Pet. ii. 15. ‡ Mat. v. 16.

A vacillating, undetermined man, is a pitiable, if not a contemptible character. What then shall we say of the professor of religion, who is all his lifetime vibrating between Christ and the world—between duty and sin? Whose engagements appear to be made only to be broken; and whose appearance at the Redeemer's table to-day, furnishes no security that he will not be found in the camp of his enemies to-morrow? He is worse than contemptible! He deserves the censures of the church, and the reprobation of heaven!

I beseech you, be consistent: Manifest a becoming decision of character. Abandon the cause of Christ altogether, or show that you are sincere and cordial in his service?—either renounce the profession of religion altogether, or else make it your business to "adorn the doctrine of God, our Saviour, in all things?" "How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, then follow him! but if Baal, then follow him."*

4. I exhort you to be faithful to your covenant engagements, from a regard *for your own comfort and happiness.* Our salvation depends on an interest in Christ: Our interest in Christ depends on our faith; and the character of our faith depends on our works. It is a judicious remark, "faith justifies the sinner, but works justify faith!" The unfaithful, ungodly professor, trampling under foot the covenant he has sealed, can have no evidence of a gracious state; and he but adds presumption to sin;

* 1 Kings, xvii. 21.

when he cries *Peace, peace!* This is the true secret why we have so few Christians comfortable and happy in their religion. They have lost their first love—they have relaxed their former diligence; and of course they have lost their former evidence. If you wish for peace of mind, and a good hope through grace, be faithful to the terms of the covenant, which you have sealed at the table of the Lord.

"The secret of the Lord (says David,) is with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant."* And again "Great peace have they which love thy law!"† Great shall be their peace in this world; and great shall be their glory in the world to come! As you value this *peace* and this *glory*, I again entreat you, to perform the vows which you have made unto the Lord.

5. Finally; I exhort you to be stedfast in your profession, by reminding you of *the guilt and the danger of apostacy*. And how can I place this consideration before you in more striking terms, than those which Scripture employs? Recollect the words of Christ: "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of heaven."‡ Let the awful denunciation of the God of Heaven ring in your ears, and sink deep in your hearts: "If any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him!"◊ Remember, too, the words of the Apostle Peter:‖ "For if after they have

* Ps. xxv. 14. † Ps. cxix. 165. ‡ Luke ix. 62.
◊ Heb. x. 38. ‖ 2 Epist. ii. 20—22.

escaped the pollutions of the world, through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning! For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them! But it is happened unto them, according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire."

Knowing therefore the terrors of the Lord, we persuade men. We place before you the crime and the curse of Judas, to deter you from apostacy; and we earnestly entreat you to make it manifest, by persevering and holy obedience, that you "are not of them who draw back unto perdition, but of them that believe to the saving of the soul."*

But I must hasten to give you a few *directions*, the observance of which, I flatter myself, will have a happy tendency to make you faithful to your covenant engagements, and, at the same time, examplary in all your deportment.

1. It will be of great use *frequently to meditate on the standing which you occupy in the church of God, and the solemn engagements you have made at the Redeemer's table.* That goodness which has given you a 'name and a place' among the saints, evidently deserves the tribute of your gratitude; and those vows, which, as a communicant in God's

* Heb. x. 39.

house, you have made, are certainly not to be disregarded. Arraign yourself frequently at the bar of conscience; and enquire whether your conduct is answerable to the high and holy obligations which rest upon you. Often remind yourself of what you have done at the sacramental table, in the presence of men, of angels, and of the heart-searching God! Say to yourself: I have made engagements, and I cannot recall them; I have enlisted under the standard of the Lord Jesus Christ, and I dare not desert it; "I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgments."

2. Be diligently engaged, from day to day, *in ascertaining and discharging your duty.* Endeavour to be both acceptable to God, and useful to men. When Paul was converted to the faith, he immediately enquired "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" A similar enquiry it is proper for you constantly to make; and, without expecting direction by a voice from heaven, you are to go to your Bible for an answer. "Search the Scriptures." "We have also a more sure word of prophecy, whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in your hearts."*

Be constant also in your attendance on the ministry of reconciliation. On the return of every Sabbath, say to those around you, "Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, and to the house

---

* 2 Pet. i. 19.

of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths."*

Be attentive also to the intimations of Providence; and follow on, as the Lord in his righteous dispensations shall point out the way. In these different ways, seek to become acquainted with your duty; and when you have ascertained what the Lord requires from you, be prompt and diligent in its performance. "Blessed is that servant, whom his Lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing."†

3. The third direction we give you is *to be regular, fervent, and persevering, in the duty of prayer.* You need the grace of God to fortify your minds against temptation, and to aid you in the discharge of duty. By daily prayer and supplication let your requests be made known: Come to the throne of Grace that you may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in every time of need. Pray without ceasing. Neither imagine that it is enough if you join in the prayers of the sanctuary; nor yet, if you pray in the family. "Public duties (it has well been remarked,) maintain our credit, but private duties maintain our life." Neglect not the devotions of the closet: be regular in your attendance on them: Pray in secret, and your Father, who seeth in secret, shall reward you openly.

"Restraining prayer, we cease to fight:
Prayer makes the Christian's armour bright:
And Satan trembles, when he sees
The weakest saint, upon his knees!

* Micah iv. 2. † Mat. xxiv. 46.

"Were half the breath, that's vainly spent,
To heaven, in supplications sent—
Our cheerful songs would oft'ner be
Hear! what the Lord has done for me!"

4. Finally; I exhort you to *watch*, as well as pray. These must go together to ensure success. Our Saviour's direction is. "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation."* Be on your guard against sin. Avoid the scenes of temptation, and the company of the profane. Make the people of God your chosen companions; and flee the contaminating influence of the ungodly! An inspired Apostle has told us, that "evil communications corrupt good manners;"† and there is always cause to tremble for the professor who loves the company, and the amusements of the enemies of the Lord Jesus Christ. "Blessed is the man, that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful."‡

And now, brethren and sisters in the Lord, I affectionately entreat you, to lay to heart these considerations, and to improve these directions. At the Redeemer's table you have solemnized a mystical marriage—and you must now perform the duties which devolve upon the spouse of Christ. Honour him, and seek to live near him, that his soul may delight in you. Manifest also, in all your conduct, an affectionate regard for your fellow-professors,

* Mat. xxvi. 41. † 1 Cor. xv. 33. ‡ Ps. i. 1.

partakers at the same table, and heirs to the same inheritance. "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no one shall see the Lord."* "Now the God of Peace, that brought again from the dead, our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."†

* Heb. xxii. 14. † Heb. xiii. 20, 21.

LETTER XX.

Excuses of professors for absenting themselves from the table of the Lord considered—and the duty of the church, in relation to such, stated.

BELOVED PEOPLE,

One of the questions proposed to an adult, who is initiated into the church by baptism, requires him to promise, that he will persevere in the communion of our Christian Church, not only in the hearing of the word; but also *in the use of the Lord's supper.** An engagement of this kind every professor is supposed to have made, either explicitly or implicitly,

* See quest. 4 in the "form for the administration of baptism to adults."

at the time of making his profession. Indeed the transaction speaks for itself: His very application to be received, as a professor, expressed a wish to partake of sealing ordinances. If this were not the object, we are at a loss to conceive what it could have been. And it is trifling with the church, as well as with the command of the great Head of the Church, to apply for the privileges of full communion—and then not improve them.

It is not a rash assumption, to assert that every person making a profession of religion *enters into covenant with the church;* and this covenant, like that which he is supposed to have previously entered into with his Saviour, is *a covenant never to be forgotten.** Its obligations are perpetual. When we enter into covenant with the Lord, we do it for eternity. When we enter into covenant with his church, it is a connexion which has a reference to eternity; and engages faithfulness in the church militant, until the Head of the Church shall be pleased to translate us to the church triumphant.

Yet, notwithstanding the correctness of these remarks, something like the doctrine of *self-excommunication* has crept into the church, in relation to the supper, as well as in relation to baptism. Fortunately, it has not been sanctioned by so many in the ministry. But error in government, as well as in doctrine, will spread, and, like a leprosy, diffuse itself over the whole system. The evil should be

* Jer. l. 8.

arrested as soon as it is discovered; and whenever this disease makes its appearance upon a member, the safety of the body requires that such member, unless a speedy cure be effected, should be amputated.

The fact cannot be concealed, nor denied, that in most of our churches, there are some professing members, who habitually absent themselves from the table of the Lord. And an idea seems to be cherished by some, who dare not openly avow it, that a professor may commune when he pleases, and refrain when he pleases; that he may commune regularly for a few years, and then withdraw himself, never more to return; nor even to be molested by impertinent questions, and troublesome citations, calling him to an account for his delinquency.—Against all this, we feel constrained to enter our protest.

No man can introduce himself into the communion of any church: It is an act of the officers of the church. And no man can break the connexion between himself and the church, after it has been formed. The officers may, upon proper application, dismiss him with a view to a connexion in some sister church: They may excommunicate him for incorrigible wickedness; or the connexion may be broken up by the dispensation of death. But in no other way can his connexion with that particular church be brought to a close. And until it has been brought to a close, he is, and must remain, subject to the care and government of that church.

But, as professors who absent themselves occasionally from the table of the Lord, as well as those who withdraw entirely, have their excuses to urge, in justification of their conduct, we propose now *to notice their difficulties; and to state the duty of the church in relation to them.*

1. The first excuse for not communing, urged by some, is *unworthiness, on their own part, arising from a conscious neglect of duty.* This is a case entitled to a degree of tenderness, although no justification can arise out of it for disobedience to a known and positive command. It is truly a lamentable case, when a professor, on the morning of a communion Sabbath, is so overwhelmed with a view of his past unfaithfulness, as to be ashamed to look up to God, and afraid to come to the Redeemer's table. —But what is to be done? Past neglect cannot excuse us from the performance of a present duty. To stay back is adding neglect, to neglect—and sin, to sin. It is a downward course; and the delinquent is in danger of waxing worse and worse, until he becomes a complete apostate!—Do you shudder at the thought of this? Then at once return to your duty, and your God. Adopt the advice, given to Job, and say:* "That which I see not, teach thou me: If I have done iniquity, I will do no more." Repent sincerely of your past unfaithfulness; and with fixed resolutions, in dependance on the grace of God, to be stedfast in the covenant, renew your

* Chap. xxxiv. 32.

vows at the Redeemer's table. Who knows, but there you may receive the grace that shall dispose and enable you to be faithful even unto death.

2. The second excuse I shall notice, as urged by some for absenting themselves from the communion table, is *the unworthiness of other communicants, with whom they do not wish to associate in this holy ordinance.* This is an excuse which, in ordinary cases, cannot be sustained by the church; and which the Lord Jesus Christ, who suffered Judas to have a place at the passover, and (as many suppose) at the supper too, notwithstanding he was acquainted with the state of his heart, certainly will not sustain. That the neglect of church officers, in not calling immoral professors to account, and dealing with them in a way of discipline, may grieve and wound the righteous, is readily admitted; but until they have taken constitutional proceedings against such unfaithful church officers, and sought a lawful redress of their grievances in vain,—and until the case has become extreme and hopeless—we cannot justify a recession from sealing ordinances.

But the objection does not contemplate *extreme cases.* And ten to one if the delinquent, who thus attempts to justify himself, be not some self-righteous Pharisee, who has undertaken to judge of the piety of his neighbour, by the features of his countenance, or the fashion of his garments. "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant?—to his own master he standeth or falleth!"*

* Rom. xiv. 4.

But suppose a fellow-professor has been guilty of disorderly conduct, how can this justify you in the neglect of your duty! His presence cannot discharge you from your obligation to attend, nor render the ordinance unholy or unprofitable to you. And, further; I wish you to consider, whether you are not as guilty as the brother, of whom you complain? Your duty, when you saw this fellow-communicant transgress, was to reprove and admonish him. The command is, "thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him."* This you have neglected to do; and now, you refuse to commune with him, because he committed a sin, of which you did not think it necessary either to speak to him, or give notice to the church! This excuse will not answer. And, no doubt, the man who makes it, would be better employed in discharging his duty, as pointed out in Scripture, to his erring brother—to his own soul—and to Jesus Christ the final and all-righteous Judge.

3. The third excuse I shall notice contemplates *offences, contentions, enmity, &c.*

It is certain, that no one can, with propriety, approach the *feast of love*, while harbouring angry, malicious, or revengeful feelings. *We must lay aside unfeignedly all enmity, hatred, and envy, and firmly resolve henceforward to walk in true love and peace with our neighbour.*† The rule, laid down by our Saviour,‡ is "If thou bring thy gift to the altar,

* Lev. xix. 17. † Form for adm. supper.
‡ Mat. v. 23, 24.

and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way, first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift."

Contentions and animosities among professors are always unpleasant and unbecoming; and when protracted, give awful evidence of a want of Christian feeling. The best man on earth may, in an unguarded moment, in consequence of constitutional irritability, or violent temptation, have his feelings strongly excited; and, during the time of such excitement, he may speak and act unadvisedly and wickedly. But, let this man have an hour to reflect —let him have time to fix his eye upon the example of his Saviour—or to call to mind a direction like the following, "Let not the sun go down upon your wrath,"*—at once his heart is softened; he laments his depravity; and asks forgiveness of God and man!

It is not *this spirit*, but a very *different spirit*, that agitates and distracts the church of Christ. We have too many who have never learned the lessons of forgiveness, and who utterly despise the laws of reconciliation!—who once angry, always angry, without any desire to be reconciled; and always guilty of impiety and falsehood, when they pray, "Forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors."† Who can suffer not only one sun to go down upon their wrath, but suffer one month to pass

* Eph. iv. 26. † Mat. vi. 12.

away after another, and one communion season after another—and they stand still, sullen as the prince of darkness—not reconciled, and no effort made to become reconciled! These are the most difficult characters in the church of Christ; and they are manifestly unworthy of a place there. They have nothing of the spirit of Christ: He was all mercy—all forgiveness,—with his last breath, he prayed for his murderers! But these *followers*, shall I call them? of the Lamb, never forgive an injury! never pray for an enemy!

It would be well for such to reflect often on these words "He shall have judgment without mercy, who hath refused to show mercy."* This may prepare them to obey the Apostolic direction: "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil-speaking, be put away from you, with all malice; and be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."†

All this class of feelings, to which we have alluded, is utterly improper and sinful—contrary to the example of Christ—contrary to the precepts of the gospel; and must be injurious both to those who indulge them, and those against whom they are indulged. "For (says the Apostle,)‡ if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another."

But let us be a little more particular in the investigation of this subject; and endeavour to ascertain

* Ja. ii. 13. † Eph. iv. 31, 32. ‡ Gal. v. 15.

what is our duty when offences and contentions occur, in which we are immediately concerned.

1. *If we have given the offence*, our first duty is, by suitable acknowledgments and reparations, to seek forgiveness and reconciliation. And even if we have not given an offence—yet, if a fellow-professor imagines that we have, it is well to remove, by a proper explanation, the erroneous impression under which he labours—and thus "to restore what we did not take away."

If our brother refuses to forgive, and be reconciled, we have done our duty—and can with safety come to the table, provided we harbour no improper feelings against him. Unreasonable enmity, on the part of others, cannot debar us from our privileges; and were we to notice it, we might always stay back from the table; for, no doubt, some one or other will always feel unfriendly toward us. Paul never administered the supper to others, or partook of it himself, when he could say, 'Every body is my friend; I have no enemy in the world.'

2. *But if the offence have been committed against us,—if we be the aggrieved party,*—what then is our duty? I reply; the rule is plainly laid down by our Saviour, in the eighteenth chapter of Matthew's gospel, 15—17: "Moreover, if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: If he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every

word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: But if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican."

In many cases, it may be perfectly proper to demand satisfaction for a wrong we have sustained; but in no case may we refuse to accept such satisfaction. "Take heed," says Christ,* "to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him."

But, if he refuses to make any acknowledgment or satisfaction for the injury inflicted on us, what then is our duty? I reply; it can never be our duty to suffer his wickedness and impenitence to rob us of our privileges, or to interfere with the expression of our allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ, our Lawgiver and our Judge! For a man to injure himself, by withdrawing from church privileges, because he has been injured by another, is so perfectly ridiculous, that, were we not convinced of the contrary, we could not suppose it possible for a rational creature to be guilty of such madness. What! because a neighbour has inflicted on you a temporal injury, will you, by way of revenge, punish your own soul, and inflict on yourself an eternal injury? O! how much better—how much more like a Christian—to forgive, and to *overcome evil with good.*

* Luke xvii. 3, 4.

Be assured of this fact: The indulgence of angry, revengeful feelings, can never form a justifying excuse for absenting ourselves from the table of the Lord. The very plea set up in such a case, proves that we are wrong; and that, while we persist, we must be guilty. "Suppose, (says Dr. Proudfit,)* that one child in a family should give offence to another child, would this justify the latter in trampling on the command of their common father? Or if one soldier in a corps behaves disorderly, would this disorder justify another in departing from the ranks, and deserting the service of his captain? I know it is often objected, that if our brother have aught against us, we are commanded to leave our gift at the altar, and go and be reconciled to our brother. But suppose that he refuses to be reconciled,—suppose that his bosom burns with rage against us,—still it becomes us to forgive, and to aim, with humility, at performing our duty."

This gives a correct view of the subject; and leaves the professor who absents himself, because he has been offended, as he alledges, without excuse. It is very evident, while he makes no effort to have the offence removed, and is unwilling to exercise forgiveness, that there is something radically wrong in himself, and that he is not sorry to have an excuse for neglecting his duty. A member, who is so easily offended—who is so difficult to be pacified—and who suffers every trifling offence to detain him from the sanctuary, and the table of the Re-

* Theol. Works, vol. iii. p. 62.

deemer—gives painful evidence, that he cares but little about being there. The value we put upon privileges may be fairly estimated, by the exertions we make to secure them. And the man who has always an excuse—who has this and the other difficulty,—who has not been used well, by this and the other member,—and who suffers disputes to be unsettled for months and years,—shows that he wants a heart to wait upon God in the ordinances of his house. O! did he love the Saviour—did he love his dying command—did he love the supper?—he could not be thus delinquent: He would renounce these animosities; he would rush through these difficulties; he would meet his Saviour at his board—and there drink in the spirit of meekness, of forbearance, and of forgiveness.

"Surely, (says the author last quoted,)* the affectionate, dutiful child, would regret that any thing should occur to prevent it from complying with the request of a beloved, revered father; or the generous soldier would feel mortified that any accident should render him incapable of appearing at his post and performing his duty, especially that he should be absent on some great occasion when the honour of his captain peculiarly required his presence; and is it no grief, no humiliation, to a professed Christian to neglect, from year to year, one of the most sublime and interesting ordinances of New Testament worship—the last injunction of

* Proudfit's works, vol. iii. pp. 61, 62.

"Him who was slain, and redeemed us unto God by his blood?"

4. The last excuse we shall notice for staying back from the table of the Lord, relates to *ecclesiastical proceedings.* The officers of the church have passed and executed some resolutions which are offensive to the complainant—and therefore he will not commune. They have made some alteration or fixtures to the place of worship; or they have erected their church on a site different from that which, he thought, most eligible; or they have exercised discipline upon a relative; or they have admitted some one as a member, of whom they do not entertain a favourable opinion; or——: but I will not enlarge. I will only remark, that church officers are accountable for their conduct to higher judicatories, and bound to govern the church according to their own views of duty, and not according to the whims of every individual belonging to the congregation.

Nothing is more easy than to say, the consistory have done wrong—the minister has done wrong—and I will not attend church; I will not commune. But how can the acts of consistory release you from your duty to your God? He has commanded you to appear statedly in his sanctuary; and when the table is spread, the notice is given to every member, "The Master is come, and calleth for thee:" And let those who refuse to obey the call prepare to answer for it to their Judge!

In the meantime, the officers of the church have a duty to perform: They are bound to notice delin-

quents, and to ascertain the cause of their delinquency, especially when their delinquency has been of some standing. Witsius says,* "that, in the early ages of the Christian Church, when the sacrament was administered every Lord's day, it was decreed by several synods, that whoever did not communicate every third Lord's day, at least, should be cut off." And I have no hesitation to assert, that every one who now absents himself, three times in succession, ought to be called to an account. The officers of the church ought to know the reasons of such absence. Sickness may occasionally prevent attendance: Some unexpected difficulty may occur just at the eve of a communion Sabbath, when there is no time nor opportunity to have it adjusted, or to bring the feelings into a proper state. But there will be time for all this before the next communion. If it be neglected, and the person is absent again on the next communion, and again on the third, it manifestly becomes a case that ought to be noticed. The officers of the church are bound to investigate it; and if expostulation, admonition, and reproof are disregarded, they must proceed to the exercise of severer discipline; and, in the name of the Lord, cut off from the fellowship of the church the incorrigible delinquent.

So it was in the Jewish church—so it was in the primitive Christian church; and so it ought to be in the churches of the Reformation.

* Vol. iii. p. 438.

LETTER XXI.

Serious address to non-communicants—Their excuses answered—their guilt stated—and their duty pointed out—Conclusion.

BELOVED PEOPLE,

In my last paper, I noticed the excuses of professors for not attending statedly and perseveringly on the sacrament of the supper. I now propose to make one more effort,* to convince such of you as are not professors, of your exceeding sinfulness in not confessing Christ before the world, and honouring him, by obedience to his dying-command.

The sacrament of the supper is certainly a most important institution; and attendance on it is at once the sacred duty and exalted privilege of all who love the Lord Jesus, and hope in his mercy! Most of you who are parents, if not all, profess to put a high value on the sacrament of baptism; and you suffer nothing to prevent you from soliciting the privilege of offering up your children. But let me solemnly entreat you to consider, whether it is more necessary to have your children baptized, than it is to have your own souls fed at the Redeemer's table? Is baptism of higher consequence to the salvation of your children, than the Lord's supper is to your

* See letter xiv.

own salvation? Why make this distinction between sacraments, which seal one and the same covenant —which require similar qualifications—which impose similar obligations—and which refer to substantially the same benefits? And why apply for the baptism of your children, and neglect to apply for a seat at the table of the Lord?

You dare not deny, that it is your duty to shew forth the death of Christ, and commemorate his dying love in the ordinance of the supper? But you have a variety of excuses; and with these you are satisfied. *These excuses, it is my design now to notice*, in order to convince you, if possible, that you ought not to be satisfied with them; and that, notwithstanding all you alledge in self-justification, you are exceedingly guilty before God for disobedience to the dying command of Christ!

1. The first and general excuse offered by those who have never made a profession of religion, when they are reminded of their duty, is *that they are unworthy*. They dare not come to the table of the Lord, for they are very sinful. That they are *very sinful* and *very unworthy*, I have no doubt—although many would rather mention it themselves, than be told of it by others. We all are unworthy, as I have already stated; and, "if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."* My great fear upon this point is, that those who say they are unworthy, are *very little troubled*

*1 Jo. i. 8.

by the conviction of unworthiness! For it is too evident, that many are willing to remain unworthy; at least, they make no visible effort to become prepared for an acceptable approach to the table of the Lord. It answers the present purpose, as an excuse, to say that they are unworthy; and there the matter rests. But O! what will it be when the heart-searching Judge arises to execute judgment? You say that you are unworthy; and that you are not prepared for so holy an ordinance. Let me beseech you to attend to the following remarks:

1. A consciousness, a deep consciousness of guilt and unworthiness, is, in part at least, the very preparation we need. God requires us to act in character. He knows that we are sinners, and unworthy of the least mercy; and when he invites us to eat the *children's bread* at his table, he requires us to come, feeling that we are unworthy—with penitent hearts, and in humble reliance for acceptance on the merits of the Lord Jesus. Now, if you *feel* unworthy, as you say you are, I am disposed and feel at perfect liberty to invite and urge you to come. "Come, (to repeat the words of Calvin,) as paupers to the liberal Benefactor—as patients to the Physician—as sinners to the Author of righteousness—as persons dead to the Fountain of life." "Thus saith the Lord, the heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool:——but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word."* The fact

* Isa. lxvi. 1, 2.

ss, the more unworthy we feel in ourselves—the more completely we renounce self-righteousness—and the more undividedly we rely on the merits of the Saviour—the better are we prepared to come acceptably and profitably to the table of the Lord; *for the poor he fills with good things, but the rich he sends empty away.*

2. My second remark is, *that, if you are not prepared for the supper of the Lord, your situation is truly awful and alarming.* You live in a dying world; and you know not how soon death may summon you into eternity, to appear before the judgment-seat of Jesus Christ! For this solemn event you are certainly not prepared, while you are unprepared to occupy a place at the Redeemer's table.

We do not mean to make the supper a saving ordinance, nor to assert that no one can be saved who has not participated at the sacred feast: But we do mean to assert, what is a manifest truth, that the supper does not require higher qualifications, than are necessary to a happy and gainful death. If you are in such a state, that coming to the table of the Lord would be offensive to him, you certainly cannot expect that he will receive you with a smile, when you appear before him as your Judge! If you are not prepared to sit down with his people at the feast of love in the church on earth, you certainly are not prepared to *sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to the marriage-supper of the Lamb, in the kingdom of heaven.* I beseech you to reflect

seriously on these truths, and to lay to heart your alarming condition, before it be too late forever!

3. I have a third remark to make. It is this: *Your want of preparation is your fault, as well as your misery.* For why are you not prepared? Because you do not love Jesus Christ; because you do not love holiness; because you do not hate sin! But is not this your guilt; and do you not on this account deserve the curse of God? You will not controvert the truth of what I assert, that all who love Christ—all who love holiness—all who hate sin—are prepared for a seat at the Redeemer's table. It must then also be true, if you are not prepared, that you hate Christ, and holiness, while you love sin! What an awful character! Can you—dare you, appropriate it?

'But you cannot change your heart; you cannot generate love to Christ and holiness; you cannot make yourself hate sin.' This is true. But you can, as a rational creature, use the means which God has appointed for these ends? And until you have done so, you are just as guilty for not loving Christ, as you would be if you had the power of changing the heart in your own hands, and refused to exercise it! The starving man, who perishes, because he will not ask for bread, and even obstinately refuses it when offered to him, is a self-murderer: And so you are guilty of murdering your soul, if you refuse to apply for mercy and grace to that God, who is *rich in mercy to all who call upon him!* Yea; who

freely offers Christ, with all his fulness of grace and glory to sinners, in the gospel!

When have you cried "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me;"* when have you, like blind Bartimeus, applied to Christ, saying, "Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy on me?"† or when have you, with holy importunity, cried out like Peter, when sinking in the waves, "Lord save me?"‡ If you have neglected to do this, the fault of not being prepared is certainly your own. It is the established order of God to work by means of his own appointment. And although it is true that God alone can change and sanctify the depraved heart, it is no less true, that "every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened!"§ These facts are, in their connexion, plainly asserted in the xxxvith chapter of Ezekiel: "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them!"‖ This is God's promise; and by issuing this promise, he asserts that it is his work to change the heart. And yet, to show us our

* Ps. li. 10. † Mark x. 47. ‡ Mat. xiv. 30.
§ Mat. vii. 8. ‖ Vs. 25, 26, 27.

duty, and incite us to the performance of it, he adds "Thus saith the Lord God, I will yet for this be enquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them!"*

No longer, then, I beseech you, pillow your conscience on an excuse, which involves an acknowledgment that you are unprepared for death, and that you have wickedly rejected the kind provisions of the gospel of God's grace.

2. But some have a different excuse, for not professing religion, and attending on the ordinance of the supper. It is this: *They do not enjoy that clear evidence of an interest in Christ, which would, in their own view, justify them in approaching the table; and they are moreover apprehensive, that, if they should now make a profession of religion, they would afterwards dishonour it by their apostacy.* This is with some a serious difficulty; and we design to treat it with tenderness. That a comfortable evidence of union with Christ is necessary to justify our approach to the table of the Lord, we have already stated.† But, that many entertain mistaken ideas upon this subject, and calculate on evidence bright as the sun—and unquestionable, as though it had been announced by a voice from heaven—is a fact well known to those who are conversant with cases of conscience.

That God may, in the work of conversion, suddenly cause light and peace to fill the soul, and dry

* Ezek. xxxvi. 37.

† Letter xviii.

up every tear, and quiet every apprehension of the mourning, trembling penitent, by the triumphs of hope, and the consolations of his Spirit, admits not of a doubt. But, it is worthy of enquiry, whether this is his ordinary method of operation in the conversion of sinners?—and also whether the high excitements and rapturous hopes, of which some make mention, and at which many others aim, furnish, upon the whole, the best evidence of a gracious state? We are disposed to give a negative answer to both these enquiries. The work of grace is as the "shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day." And unless the evidence of grace out-runs grace itself, it must also be progressive. Many Christians wish to enjoy, at the time of conversion, all the evidence and comfort of old and long established saints. This they ought not to expect. If they can, upon impartial examination, discover in themselves *sincere contrition for sin; an ardent desire to be found in Christ; a supreme love to God; and a prevailing disposition to put on the Lord Jesus Christ by holy resemblances, and to honour him in all his offices;* they have a sufficient cause for lively gratitude, and a sufficient warrant to approach the table of communion. Why, under circumstances like these, should they yield to the suggestions of satan, or suffer their unbelief to rob God of his glory, and their own souls of comfort? Rather let them improve their present measure of grace and comfort; and in faithful attendance on the ordinances of God's house, seek to have their faith

strengthened, and their hopes confirmed,—lest, while they are waiting for brighter evidence, God, displeased with their unbelief and neglect of duty, punish them by depriving them of the little measure of comfort which they at present enjoy, and leave them to mourn in hopeless distress. Presume not, then, to ask too much: But in the way of duty seek to know and enjoy more of the God of salvation. Confess him before men; and rely on his grace to "keep you from falling," and "to fulfil in you all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power." While you dread the evils of apostacy, do not distrust the grace and faithfulness of God: He to whose service you devote yourself, in the public profession of religion, has said "My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness."* "Trust in the Lord, and do good." Live by faith on the Son of God, deriving from him all necessary supplies of grace and strength; and you need not fear the result of your Christian profession: It will be honourable to God, and most comfortable to yourself; and "when Christ, who is our life shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory."†

3. But there is a third excuse offered by some for declining, to make a profession of religion, and to join in the commemoration of the Saviour's death. It is this: *There are many who profess religion, and go to the table of the Lord, who are no*

---

* 2 Cor. xii. 9. † Col. iii. 4.

better than their neighbours; and who, by their inconsistent practice, show that they are mere hypocrites; and therefore we will not pretend any thing on the subject: We will neither connect with the church, nor go to the sacrament. That is; because some have been unfaithful to fulfil engagements, which it was their duty to make, you will decline entering into engagements, which the positive command of God nevertheless requires you to assume. Your duty, as stated in Scripture, is first to *vow*, and then to *pay to the Lord* that which you have vowed.* Take heed, therefore, that your unwillingness to associate around the Redeemer's table with those, whom you are pleased to call hypocrites—and who, in reality, may be such—does not bind you to an eternal fellowship with them in the abodes of misery! Take heed, lest, when they are punished for their hypocrisy, you are sent to the same place of torment, for your neglect of a positive institution, and your wilful disobedience to the Lord Jesus Christ! If others make a *hypocritical* profession, and commune *unworthily*, that is not *your* sin, neither can it release you from your obligation to make a *sincere* profession, and to give an *acceptable* attendance on the supper of our Lord. "Every man shall bear his own burden."† You have duties to perform for yourself, with which others have nothing to do; and in the performance of which, you have nothing to do with others. Of you, as a sinner, and

* Ps. lxxvi. 11.

† Gal. vi. 5.

a candidate for an unending eternity, it is required to believe in the Lord Jesus—to love him, and to keep his commandments—especially his dying command: And, if you do so, whoever else may perish, you shall be saved with exceeding joy and eternal glory.

4. But there is a fourth—and a most alarming difficulty—which we have to notice. The Apostle has said,* *that "he who eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself;" and you are afraid to seal your destruction at the Redeemer's table.* This is truly an alarming consideration; one which powerfully urges the necessity of self-examination, and loudly cautions against an unhallowed approach to the table of the Lord. *He who eats and drinks unworthily, eats and drinks damnation to himself;* that is, he who profanes the holy ordinance of the supper by an unworthy approach incurs damnation. But, have you considered, on the other hand, that he who does not eat and drink at the Redeemer's table also incurs damnation? An inspired Apostle tells us, that "the wages of sin is death;"† and by mentioning *eternal life*, by way of contrast, in the following clause, he shows that the idea of *eternal misery* is, among others, to be attached to the term *death*, as there used. Every sin, whether of omission or commission—whether of thought, word, or deed, deserves the eternal displeasure and curse of Jehovah. And although I am

* 1 Cor. xi. 29. † Rom. vi. 23.

not prepared to say, that it is not more wicked to commune unworthily, than not to commune at all; I am prepared to say that either is *sin:* And that either, unless repented of, and forgiven through the blood of the Lord Jesus, must draw down the eternal wrath of God upon the offender.

But is it possible, that the sin of eating and drinking unworthily at the Lord's table can be forgiven? Does not the Apostle preclude all hope of pardon, when he says that such eat and drink damnation to themselves? Here is the very heart of the difficulty in regard to this passage. The superstition and the fears of many lead them to consider the sin of unworthy communing, as absolutely *unpardonable;* or, at least, they wish to excuse themselves, by making us believe that they so understand it. It is indeed to be regretted that our translation assumes a harshness, which the original does not require, and which Dr. Doddridge* considers the most unhappy mistake in all our version of the Bible. Yet, a little attention to the language, and reasoning of the Apostle, will enable us to understand his meaning. The original word Κριμα signifies *judgment*, and is frequently so rendered. The Dutch translation expresses this idea,† and is in this instance, as well as many others, to be preferred to the English. Again; it is an established rule in Biblical criticism, that the text is to be explained by the context. An examination of what follows the terrific expression "damnation,"

---

* Family Expositor—note. † Oordeel.

will teach us that, according to the Apostle's view, the *damnation*, incurred by a profanation of this ordinance, may consist in *temporal afflictions*—weakness, sickness, &c. "For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep."* This was the damnation or judgment sent on the Corinthians, for their disorderly and profane conduct in relation to the supper. Still further; the Apostle gives us to understand that the *damnation*, incurred by the profanation of this ordinance, may be inflicted on such as are in a *state of grace*, and consequently out of the reach of *everlasting misery*. "But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world."† The damnation or judgment sent on the believing Corinthians consisted in *fatherly chastisements, designed to prevent their eternal condemnation*. The idea of the Apostle, we conceive then to be this: God will visit the sin of an unworthy and profane approach to the Redeemer's table with fatherly chastisements, temporal afflictions, or eternal punishments, as the nature of the case, and the character of the offenders, shall render proper and necessary.

That he cannot mean more is evident from the fact, conceded in the subsequent verses, and already noticed, that some of the Corinthian believers were guilty of the sin, for which he reproves them, and against which he cautions them. And, indeed, it is no doubt the case in our day, that true believers

* 1 Cor. xi. 30. † V. 32.

sometimes commune unworthily. Their union to Christ gives them an *habitual* preparation for the supper; but in a time of declension they may nevertheless, for the want of *actual* preparation, come to the table of the Lord in an improper and unworthy manner. But a believer cannot commit an *unpardonable sin.* The commission of such a sin is inconsistent with God's unchangeable love to his people, and the doctrine of the final perseverance of the saints.

To conclude our remarks on this expression of the Apostle. The sin of communing unworthily deserves the eternal curse of God; but it is not a sin absolutely unpardonable. It may be repented of; and when repented of, it shall be forgiven! And what more favourable statement can you make of the sin of not communing? Does not that deserve eternal punishment?—or will that be forgiven without repentance?—Certainly the wide difference which some make between these sins is altogether unwarranted, and unscriptural.

Under the construction which I have put upon the term *damnation*, as here used by the Apostle—and of the correctness of that construction I presume you will be satisfied—damnation lies on either side! If you commune unworthily, you incur damnation. If you neglect to commune, you incur damnation, too Which will you choose? O! let me again* exhort you not to choose either side of

---

* See letter xiv.

this chilling alternative! Behold! I show unto you a more excellent way! Flee to the Lord Jesus Christ!—embrace him as your only hope, as your only Saviour! Repent sincerely of all your sins, and devote yourselves heartily and entirely to the service of the God who made you, who sent his Son to save the lost; and who will shortly be the Judge of quick and dead. "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found; call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon!"*

And now, beloved people, I am prepared, so far as these letters are concerned, to give you my parting blessing. May the God of mercy give audience to my prayers, and bless my intentions, and my labours, to your religious improvement and your everlasting welfare! With a degree of anxiety and labour far beyond what was anticipated when I took up my pen, I have brought these letters to a close. Frequently, in the course of these discussions, has my pen been dropped through discouragement and fatigue; and once, as you know, my pen has been laid aside to witness, in the death of a very promising and favourite child, the prostration of one of my fairest earthly hopes! That wounding providence, under which my heart still bleeds, and the recollection of which moistens this page with a tear, has, I

* Isa. lv. 6, 7.

trust, had the effect to make me feel more sensibly than ever the importance of the relation between parents and children; and caused me to admire, with livelier gratitude, the exceeding riches of that grace of our God, which gives to our children a name and a place in his covenant; and, in infinite condescension, promises "I will be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee!"——That wounding providence, I can also assure you, has filled me with the tenderest solicitude for your own and your children's welfare: and O! that God may give me, in answer to my prayers, the satisfaction to see, that this labour and that affliction have not been in vain! May covenant blessings rest upon you and your offspring! And may we all at last meet each other —our respective children—and our common Judge ——in PEACE!

"Now unto Him, that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless, before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy: To the only wise God, our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen."*

* Jude, vs. 24, 25.

APPENDIX.

REMARKS

ON THE

IMPORTANCE OF CORRECT VIEWS OF THE SYSTEM OF REVEALED RELIGION.

THE NECESSITY of a revelation from Heaven, *to guide our feet in the way of peace*, has been felt and acknowledged by all who have entertained correct views of the perfections of God, and the fallen condition of man. Whatever ideas of the attributes of Deity, and of the moral obligations of intelligent creatures, may have been excited in the mind, by surveying the heavens above, and the earth beneath, with the various orders of created beings subjected to our observation—certain it is, that unassisted reason has never been found competent to determine whether the Supreme Being, to whom holiness and justice necessarily belong, *can in any case* pardon sin?—or if he can, *on what terms* his pardoning mercy will be dispensed!

This is a point of unutterable importance to a mind agonized by the consciousness of guilt, and

exclaiming, with all the anxiety which the most fearful apprehensions can excite, 'What must I do to be saved?' And the fact, that God has been pleased to meet and remove this difficulty, by making a perfect revelation of his will to man, will be a subject of exalted praise to all eternity! It is the BIBLE, and the Bible only, which teaches us that "there is one God, and one Mediator between God and man—the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due season!"*

The law of the Lord is perfect converting the soul.† Whatever instruction we need either in matters of faith or practice, the Bible furnishes. "Thy word," says David,‡ "is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." The Bible is our law-book: And the substitution of the authority of the Holy Scriptures, in the place of the long acknowledged infallibility of the Pope of Rome, was one of the happiest results of that spirit of enquiry which produced the Reformation. The Bible which, to the shame of Popery, had long been an obscure book—the dusty inmate of the cloister—was then brought to view; and while it shed heavenly light on the path of Luther, Zuingle, Calvin, and others, in their illustrious march to ecclesiastical reformation, and spiritual freedom, was by them honoured in return, and deservedly raised to the dignity of supreme Judge, whose decisions are final, and from which their lies no appeal.

This is one of the grand principles of the Reformation, to which all Protestants profess to adhere: 'The Bible is the supreme law; and in all matters of faith and duty, the Bible, and the Bible alone, is to decide.' *To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.*

---

*1 Tim. ii. 5, 6. †Ps. xix. 7. ‡Ps. cxix. 105.

The establishment of this very correct and important principle has given a new character to the conflicts of the Church since the days of the Reformation. The Bible, to which such high and holy importance was attached, soon became the object of attack, and the target, at which all the fiery darts of the wicked were aimed. Hordes of infidels speedily made their appearance; and with different degrees of talents, learning, and virulence, attempted to resist the claims which had been set up in favour of the inspired volume—to extinguishing the rising light of Christendom,—and to bring down the towering hopes, and poison the sweetest consolations of the children of the Reformation.

This spirit of infidelity, widening in its influence, and strengthened in its energies, put forth its most vigorous exertions, and performed its deadliest works, during the closing years of the last century.

Then emphatically was the age of infidelity. The book of Heaven was subjected to the severest scrutiny. One objected to its chronology; another to its geography; a third found fault with its natural philosophy; while a fourth impugned its history. One tried its purity by the rules of grammar; and another measured its style by the laws of rhetoric. All concurred to denounce it, together with its various and sacred institutions, as vile imposition and abominable priestcraft!

But, through this fiery ordeal—this reign of terror—this hour of the power of darkness—the Bible has passed unhurt; or rather, let me say, greatly confirmed in its claims, as a divine revelation! And while the hosts of infidels have gone down to the grave—their memory forgotten, or only remembered to be execrated—the Bible still lives; and lives to carry on its bloodless triumphs, until the *earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.**

* Hab. ii. 14.

To this universal ascendancy and triumph the Bible is rapidly advancing in our day. The age in which we live is the age of Bible effort, and Bible triumph. The rich and the poor are bringing their gifts into the Lord's treasury; and the Bible, carried on the wings of mercy, will shortly be conveyed *to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people.**

But, reader, is it not worthy of enquiry, whether the study of the Bible, and the knowledge of its sacred contents, have in our day borne any just proportion to the exertions which have been made for its general circulation.

It has been asserted, and I would rejoice to be convinced that the assertion was unadvised and incorrect, that "amidst an extensive and powerful excitement on the subject of the Bible, a portentous unconcern overwhelms the churches respecting the doctrines of the Bible: While the number of professors is increasing with an amazing rapidity, zeal for the truth decreases in the same degree; and that there is evidently a greater concern to extend the limits of the church than to improve her members."† Certain it is, that the sending of the Bible to others, can never be accepted, as a substitute, for the reading of it ourselves. It cannot, in the least degree, release us from the obligation, to search the Scriptures, which testify of Jesus Christ, and make known the grace of God to man. Much less can the astonishing combination of effort in the Christian world, for the distribution of the Scriptures (so much and so justly applauded in our day,) justify us in countenancing the errors which are pouring in upon us, and in sacrificing the peculiar doctrines of the Christian system on the altar of undefined catholicism. We only dream, if we imagine that the charities and liberal sentiments of our day have put an end to

---

* Rev. xiv. 6. † Strictures on Dr. Mason's Plea, p. 70

the conflicts of the church, and redeemed her out of her militant state.

The enemies of the truth still live; "and almost all who have taken an extensive view of Zion's interests, and her course down the tract of time, agree in warning her sons of a period of thickening and excessive darkness and trouble, previous to her latter day glory!"* "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that, in the latter times, some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils!"† "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables!"‡

Such are the warnings of revelation. And who can tell whether the corrupters and opposers of Bible truths in our day are not aiming to effect, by compromise and pretended friendship, what they have been unable to accomplish by open and avowed hostility; and under an ostensive warfare against the shibboleths of party, hurling their envenomed darts at the shibboleths of truth? Surely there are many in our day *who speak not the language of Canaan, but the language of Ashdod.*

At such a time, there is a peculiar necessity for the friends of evangelical truth, by a diligent investigation of the system of revealed religion, to arm for the warfare, that they may *quit themselves like men;* and convince the advocates of error, that, although Calvin no longer occupies the professoral chair at Geneva—although Luther no longer defies the host of devils at Worms—although the intrepid Knox no longer thunders in the ears of the graceless Mary—the true sons of the Reformation have not forgotten that it is their duty to *contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints.* "Thus saith the Lord,

* Strictures, &c. p. 71. † 1 Tim. iv. 1. ‡ 2 Tim. iv. 3, 4.

stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls."* "If ye continue in my words," says Christ,† "then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

Faithful adherence to the doctrines, and cordial submission to the commandments of Jesus Christ, are the test of sincere discipleship. This recognizes a perfectly natural and universally acknowledged principle. Every system, whether of philosophy, or politics, or religion, has its peculiarities by which it is known and distinguished; and the destruction of these peculiarities is the destruction of the system to which they belong. The Christian system, as well as every other, has its peculiarities, to all of which, the great Teacher come from God demands our adherence and submission.

Neither will the expedient too frequently resorted to in the church on earth, of giving a general and disguised assent to the Christian system, while its distinguishing peculiarities are left out of view, or utterly rejected, meet with acceptance in the court above! True; by this expedient the pale of the visible church may be greatly extended, and the external fellowship of churches greatly promoted. The clean and the unclean, the pure and the impure, the orthodox and the hetrodox, may thus be embodied; and, collected around the Redeemer's table, may hold their communion on catholic principles, and meet and embrace each other on the broad ground of a common Christianity. But is this common Christianity the Christianity of the Bible? A building, stripped of its ornaments, its architraves and its mouldings disfigured or torn away, no longer pleases the eye of the architect—no longer exhibits its true character. It is now, not

* Jer. vi. 16. † Jo. viii. 31, 32.

what it was designed to be, nor what it in reality once was: The rude hand of the destroyer has made it a graceless mass—a mere wreck. Let the Temple of Mercy, reared by the hand of the "great God, our Saviour," the topstone of which shall be laid *with shouts of grace, grace unto it*—and the glories of which were but faintly symbolized by the far-famed glories of the temple at Jerusalem;—let this temple of mercy be committed to the hands of all who claim a common friendship,—let every one tear away what offends him, and add what suits him, —and what of original design, of primitive beauty, and of distinctive character will remain? Christianity, deprived by lawless depredations and interpolations of all that makes it the system of Jesus Christ, is not worth retaining. Neither is a fellowship, founded on the mutual sacrifice of the peculiarities of the various systems which have arrogated the Christian name, worth enjoying. The Calvinist is a Christian—the Arminian is a Christian—the Universalist is a Christian—and the Socinian, blaspheming the Saviour and the Comforter of the church, is a Christian, too! Calvinists, Arminians, Universalists, and Socinians, meet on common ground; while many stand ready to make a false application of scripture, and to exclaim "Behold! how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!"

Ah! reader, this expedient will not answer. *The clay and the iron will not unite.* Jesus Christ will not own the corrupters of his word as his friends and disciples. The revelation which he has made of his mind and will, as we have already remarked, is most perfect: and this perfection consists not only in making known every thing necessary to be believed, and in prescribing every thing necessary to be done; but also in stating and enjoining nothing beyond what is necessary to be known, believed, and practised. "The Scripture (says Cal-

vin)* is the school of the Holy Spirit, in which, as nothing necessary and useful to be known is omitted, so nothing is taught which is not beneficial to be known." And a greater than Calvin has said, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good work."† Accordingly we find that God has solemnly guarded every truth of the inspired volume. Hear the warning on this subject from his own mouth: "For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book: If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book!"‡

Now, with this awful warning before you, take up the holy book, and tell me which truth you will undertake to dismiss from its pages? Upon which truth dare you even sit in judgment, and pronounce it *unessential?* I readily admit, that one revealed truth is of greater importance and higher interest than another: and so in a gold mine, one parcel of ore may be richer than another; but the less valuable still contains *gold:* It has often been remarked by writers, who lived nearer the days of the Reformation than we do, and in relation to this very point too, "that even the filings of gold are precious." Truth is still truth; and the very shreds and particles of it are precious to those who have a heart to say, "O how I love thy law!" Every truth revealed in Scripture must be important. To

* Inst. vol. ii. p. 417. † 2 Tim. iii. 16.
‡ Rev. xxii. 18, 19.

suppose the contrary is to impeach the wisdom of God, who has made it known.

And where is the man who shall undertake to instruct me, how many of the truths of the Bible are *essential*, and how many are *not essential* to my salvation? Who will presume to advise me on this point, Where in the list of Bible truths can I, with safety, arrest my faith, and withhold my assent?—which truth of the Bible am I bound, under pain of eternal death to embrace, and which am I permitted to reject?—which am I compelled to hold inviolate, and which am I suffered to mutilate and pervert?

Ah! brethren, "the things which are revealed—*all the things* which are revealed—belong unto us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law."* My duty and your duty is to study the *whole* word of God, and to embrace every truth it exhibits, and to practise every duty it enjoins,—"to esteem all God's precepts concerning all things to be right, and to hate every false way."†

Such was the view of the Christian system, taken by the churches of the Reformation, when the friends of the Lord Jesus would rather suffer their blood to be shed than to surrender up any truth of revelation! They contended for the truth, and for the whole truth; and the result was that their fellowship was a *real Christian communion of feeling, founded on a communion of sentiment.* Who that has examined the subject, has not been struck with the surprizing agreement in the creeds and confessions of the Reformed Church, not only in what are now called essentials, but also in what many are now pleased to denominate non-essentials. "The fabulous music of the spheres (says a writer,)‡ can-

---

* Deut. xxix. 29. † Ps. cxix. 128.

‡ Mather's Mag. vol. ii. p. 156.

not be supposed more delicious, than that harmony which is to be seen in the confessions of the Reformed Churches."

This harmony, we conceive, would not have been disturbed to the present day, if every truth of God's word had been held sacred and important. But a license granted, with much charity, by mutual consent, to receive or reject—to maintain or corrupt—the truths of revelation, as shall appear right to those who assume the Christian name; and, at the same time, a common agreement to decry, as bigots and troublers in Israel, all who adhere closely to the word of God, and the confessions and principles of the Reformation, without perverting or departing from the standards they have subscribed and sworn to support. Such a license, and such an agreement, have overwhelmed the churches with error—distracted them with confusion, and dismembered them by schism.

Modern errorists, it is true, like their predecessors, plead for indulgence. Arminius too pleaded for indulgence; and when the errors he had disseminated were discussed in the venerable Synod of Dort, the plea of the followers of Arminius was still, to be permitted to enjoy and propagate their own sentiments. But the members of that Synod well understood their duty, as witnesses for the truth. They well understood, that faithfulness to their Master, and their Master's cause, called for their testimony in favour of the truth as it is in Jesus. They followed the enemy through all his subtle windings—brought him to view—and put the mark of reprobation upon him. Charity is but disgraced when brought forward as an advocate for error. Charity is not a fool, incompetent to determine between truth and falsehood; neither is charity a *Gallio, caring for none of these things.* The charity so highly commended by the Apostle, is a charity that

rejoices in the truth,* and never lends her name to recommend and sanctify indifference to the truth.

It is of the nature of error to proceed from bad to worse. The most monstrous heresies have grown from small beginnings; and if our whole attention is to be directed to full-grown errors, while puny striplings are to be suffered to grow up unnoticed, the church will never want for giants in heresy. While you fight the monster, the little reptiles are springing up around your feet, and soon they will become monsters too. You might as well expect to dry up some mighty river, while all its tributary streams are permitted to pour their contents into its channel, as to expect to extirpate heresy from the church of God, in this way.

I repeat it: A disposition to receive the whole law from Christ's mouth—to embrace every doctrine which he makes known—and to practice every duty which he inculcates—must ever be considered as furnishing the best evidence of sincere discipleship in the school of Christ. "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed."

Such a sincere and stedfast adherence to the truth cannot fail to be productive of the most important advantages. "The truth," says the great Prophet of the Church, "shall make you free." The weak and wicked assertion, that it is of no consequence what a man believes, while his practice is moral, is inconsistent with the dictates of common sense, as well as the plainest statements of Scripture. What! does not God—the heart-searching God—regard sentiments, as well as practice? What! do not opinions influence actions? What! does it matter nothing whether a man believes the truth, or its opposite?—whether he puts a right or wrong construction upon the revelation of God's will? If so;

* 1 Cor. xiii. 6.

why did God give us a revelation at all?—or why in this revelation command us to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints? The fact is, *truth*, and the *being of the truth*, are all-important in the accomplishment of God's eternal designs of mercy to the children of men!

Error of every description must be destructive in its tendency. And who are they that "are tossed to and fro, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness whereby they lie in wait to deceive?" They are "children, who have not yet come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man—unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."*

Who are they that "wrest the Scriptures to their own destruction? An Apostle shall again answer: They are such as are "unlearned and unstable."† A knowledge of the truth is necessary to save us from the influence of error, and the snares of the father of lies. "The more (says a writer,) we understand of divine truth, the more our minds will be enlarged, and the more decided will be our opposition to error. To call that liberality which holds all doctrines with a loose hand, and considers it of no importance to salvation whether we believe this or that, is a gross perversion of language."

But truth, as we have already intimated, is the great instrument of sanctification. The prayer of our Saviour is "Sanctify them through thy truth."‡ His promise is "The truth shall make you free." This is God's own instrument to purify the hearts of his people—to prepare them for his service and enjoyment on earth; and his more perfect service and enjoyment in heaven. "The whole matter of sanctification and holiness is peculiarly joined with and

---

* Eph. iv. 13, 14. † 2 Pet. iii. 16.
‡ Jo. xvii. 17.

limited unto the doctrine, truth, and grace of the gospel; for holiness is nothing but the implanting, writing, and realizing of the gospel in our souls. Hence it is termed, Eph. iv. 24, *The holiness of truth*, which the truth of the gospel ingenerates, and which consists in a conformity thereunto; and the gospel itself is, Titus i. 1, *The truth which is according to godliness*, which declares that godliness and holiness which God requireth.——This alone is that truth *which makes us free*, Jo. viii. 32; that is, from sin and the law, unto righteousness and holiness."* Indeed, it involves a manifest absurdity to suppose that God will sanctify falsehood; and therefore it follows most clearly, that incorrect views of the system of revealed religion must operate to the prejudice even of true believers, and greatly retard the work of their sanctification: *Their wood, hay, and stubble must be burnt up; and in this they shall suffer loss—although they themselves will be saved, yet so as by fire.*†

Striking is the description given by the Apostle of the tendency of both falsehood and truth. "And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie; that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness. But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren, beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth; whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."‡

Such is the vast importance of truth in saving us from error, from sin, and from everlasting destruction! How anxious ought we then to be, to know, and believe, and practise the truth—especially when

* Owen on the Spirit, vol. ii. pp. 51, 52.

† 1 Cor. iii. 11—15. ‡ 2 Thess. ii. 11—14.

we have the promise of our Lord Jesus Christ, that a desire to know and obey the truth shall not be disappointed. "Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord."* "If any man will do his will," says Christ,† "he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself." The Lord Jesus Christ is the Prophet, as well as the Priest, and King of the Church; and these promises, proceeding from his mouth, are sufficiently explicit and encouraging to call forth the most vigorous exertions—to understand and practice the whole revealed will of God. Success in any investigation is gratifying: but success in our endeavours to know the mind and will of God—to know the plan and way of salvation—to know the true God, and Jesus Christ, whom he has sent—Oh! this is of the highest importance! And success in this is insured to us by the promise of Jesus Christ, through the agency of the Holy Ghost. "He will guide you into all truth."‡

Let it however not be forgotten, that the promised agency of the Holy Ghost does not supersede the necessity of exertion, on our part. The promise, in another part of the inspired volume, runs thus: "If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures—then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God."§

If it be enquired, what are the means to be employed by us in the cultivation of religious knowledge? we are prepared to give a few directions; and then we shall dismiss the subject.

1. We recommend the diligent and prayerful perusal of the word of God. The Bible is our law-book; and a man might as well call himself a physician, without having attended to the study of medicine, or a lawyer without having examined the

* Hos. vi. 3. † Jo. vii. 17. ‡ Jo. xvi. 13.
§ Prov. ii. 4, 5.

system of jurisprudence, as to call himself a Christian, without having studied his Bible. "Search the Scriptures," said Christ; "for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me!"* The Bereans are commended by the Apostle,† as more noble than those in Thessalonica, because they daily searched the Scriptures to ascertain whether these things were so? Neither should our attention be confined to any particular part of Scripture: The whole should be read, both Old and New Testaments; for they mutually explain each other; and by their combined instruction make the man of God perfect, thoroughly furnished to every good work.

But as the Scriptures were written by inspiration of God—and as "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit, for they are foolishness to him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned,"‡—it will follow that the reading of the Scriptures ought always to be accompanied with sincere prayer for divine illumination. David, although inspired himself, found it necessary to pray to be enabled to understand what he and others had written. "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law."§

The neglect of this important duty is the great cause of religious ignorance in our land. Favoured with the word of God, faithfully translated into our own language, how inexcusably guilty are we in suffering it to lie unread, day after day, and perhaps week after week! And while this is the case, is it surprizing that many should be found in Christendom, who know very little more about Christianity than its name? We boast of the improvements of our day: They are confessedly great. The most astonishing discoveries have been made in natural

* Jo. v. 39. † Acts xvii. 11. ‡ 1 Cor. ii. 14
§ Ps. cxix. 18.

philosophy; and, by the judicious application of some of its principles, the most surprizing facilities have been given to many of the concerns and operations of life. But it is very questionable, indeed, whether the developement of the laws of nature, and the knowledge of the principles of revelation, have, in our day, travelled with equal pace. Yea; it is even very questionable, whether it would turn out to our advantage to compare with men of former years, who never enjoyed the advantages of modern improvements, in point of Bible knowledge. The Bible, designed for the benefit of men of every grade of talent, and shade of improvement, does not suspend a knowledge of its truths on any given degree of human science; but on the honest desires and exertions of a heart in love with the truth! Tertullian, in allusion to the acknowledged incompetency of a philosopher to answer the question "What is God?" said, that every mechanic among Christians knew God, and could make him known to others!

"Formerly (says M. Durand,)* Christian families were accustomed to draw riches, both new and old, from this sacred repository. Believers were anxious to enjoy the consolations of the Bible. They read it daily; they read it with attention—with humility and veneration. The father rehearsed to his children the wonders of the Most High! He conversed of his miracles, of his testimonies, and of his goodness.——And what precious fruits resulted from these exercises. The children early learnt to know the God of their fathers! The sweet fragrance of the gospel was diffused through the family, and the church universally felt its influence!"

Conscious of our unfaithfulness, with what feeling, ought we to add, in the words of the same

* Vol. i. p. 64, as quoted by Bayard in his letters on the sacrament, p. 183.

writer: "Oh happy days, when shall we have their return! If we but *knew the gift of God;* if we knew what nourishment a hungry soul derives from an attentive perusal of the sacred volume; we should not then be substituting in its place those light and dangerous books, calculated more to amuse than to instruct, which are the cause of so many miseries to individuals and to the church!"

2. Next to the reading of the Bible, we recommend constant and serious attendance on the preaching of the word. David's desire was to dwell in the house of the Lord, that he *might enquire* in his temple * And one of the predicted characteristics of the church, in her latter day glory, is thus described: "And many nations shall come and say—Come; and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and *he will teach us of his ways,* and we will walk in his paths."† God has appointed the ministry of reconciliation to explain and enforce the truths of his word, and to communicate to men the knowledge of the way of life, through a crucified Redeemer: And it is at once the duty and the privilege of all who live in gospel countries to attend statedly on the instructions of the sanctuary: "For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth; for he is the messenger of the Lord of Hosts."‡ Upon this point I will not enlarge; but beg leave to refer you to the "Tract on Public Worship," at the close of this volume.

3. We recommend a consistent and faithful course of family instruction. The amount of religious knowledge in the world, a few years hence, must depend on the means used to instruct the rising generation. Our youth are not only to be urged to the reading of the Bible, but they are to be as-

---

* Ps. xxvii. 4. † Micah iv. 2. ‡ Mal. ii. 7.

sisted in collecting from the Bible a system of truth. Systematic instruction will ever be found the most successful and beneficial; and we have no reason to expect that our children, even with the Bible in their hands, will form correct ideas of the truths it reveals, without being aided in their enquiries. The Eunuch, with the 53d chapter of Isaiah before him, did not understand what he read, until Philip *guided him.* Parents, and the officers of God's church, are bound to guide the young committed to their charge in the way of truth and duty.

To facilitate this course of instruction, our church is furnished with catechisms, and other standards, acknowledged among us to be excellent "forms of sound words." Nothing of human invention is perhaps better calculated to guard the young against the errors of the day, than an acquaintance with these comprehensive summaries of revealed truth. Adherence to standards has always been the grand preventive against the introduction of new and corrupt sentiments.

Let our children be early made acquainted with the standards of our church; let their memories be stored with truth, and they will be found to be strongly fortified against the seductions of heresy. I remember the remark of an aged and distinguished divine: "An enemy (said he,) is desirous to fill a bushel with tares: I am too quick for him, and fill it with wheat: There is now no room for the tares!"

It is distinctly recollected, what a cry was raised in a certain part of our country but a few years since against creeds, confessions, and church standards The *measure* was then tolerably well filled with wheat! The Puritan faith, expressed in the *Savoy Confession,* adopted substantially by the Synod of Boston in 1680, still prevailed in a good degree. But confessions and standards had to be broken down—the *measure* had to be emptied; and thus

room made for the tares, which have since been gathered in so great abundance.

It will be well for us, if we are not punished in a similar way, for our neglect of the standards of our church. It is a lamentable truth, that the standards of the Reformed Dutch Church are but very imperfectly understood by her professed friends. What a shame, that parents should bring forward their children in the ordinance of baptism; assent to the doctrines of our church; and promise to bring up their children in those doctrines; without ever having read the standards of the church, or ever after enjoining it upon their children to read them!

Parents are greatly to blame in these respects. Religious instruction, and particularly catechising, is to be begun in the family: And what a blessing to children to have pious and faithful parents, who make conscience of training up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, by a course of religious instruction, and godly example! Oh! had we a greater number of mothers and grand-mothers in our Israel like Eunice and Lois, we should have a greater number of youth, like Timothy, acquainted with the Scriptures from the period of childhood,—or if their pious labours did not take immediate effect, we should oftener see the exertions of a godly *Monica* rewarded, and her prayers answered, in the conversion of a profligate *Augustine!* "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it."*

4. Finally; the reading of works on practical piety, embracing the peculiarities of the evangelical system, and exhibiting the operations of divine grace on the soul, and its effects on the conduct, is well calculated to improve the mind in the knowledge of the truth. In this respect, too, we are greatly defi-

* Prov. xxii. 6.

cient, and fall very far short of the example set us by Christians who have preceded us. The families of our forefathers were richly supplied with such works as I have just mentioned. They were not afraid to handle a quarto, nor apprehensive that they would know too much, if they studied a regular system of divinity. But we, their descendants, destitute of the taste for reading, and love of truth, by which they were distinguished, are unwilling to expend any part of our money in the purchase of books, or any portion of our time in reading them. To meet the first difficulty, and to render the expense of books as light a burden as possible, I have more than once suggested to you the *plan of a congregational library*. By very moderate contributions, from year to year, a congregation might thus, in a short time, put itself in possession of an invaluable treasure. Upon this plan, too, the selection of books, devolving upon the officers of the church, would probably be much more judicious than could be expected, if every family should make choice for itself. Certain it is, that every congregation ought to be supplied with a good collection of evangelical and practical works accessible to the poor, who have not the means to supply themselves—as well as the rich, who would probably be the principal contributors to such an establishment.

I conclude these remarks with an extract from an address of Doctor John Ewin, and other eminent ministers of that day, in Philadelphia, prefixed to "Dickinson's letters."

"In this country (say they,) where opinions are everywhere freely circulated upon all subjects, and where there is a great diversity of sentiments respecting religion, it is of the utmost consequence to the cause of truth to promote a taste for reading the works of judicious and practical writers, upon the important doctrines of the gospel.

"Diligent inquiry and strict investigation into the principles of religion are ever favourable to its progress and power upon the mind. The gospel invites, nay demands examination; and the more we enquire into its evidences, and inform ourselves of its contents, with a conscientious design to practice its duties, the more shall we be confirmed in our belief of its divine original—and the more shall we feel its beneficial and meliorating effects upon our conduct in life. Hence it has often been found in experience, that, when a general attention to the searching of the Scriptures, and to the reading of those writings which are most evangelical in their spirit, has prevailed in various places—there living, practical religion, has been restored to a flourishing state: And again, where men have been most diligent in the exercise of the duties of piety, there a zeal and taste for pure and peculiarly evangelical principles has ever revived and prevailed. It would therefore give us great pleasure, as ministers of the gospel, and be a happy presage of the increase and stability of the church of Christ in this country, to see such a disposition generally prevail."

These are the means which to me appear best calculated to prove useful in the cultivation of religious knowledge. Such exertions, made in dependence on the blessing of Him, who has said that his disciples *shall know the truth*, cannot but be crowned with the most desirable success—*making you wise unto salvation, through faith, which is in Christ Jesus;* to whom be glory forever. Amen.

CANONS

RATIFIED IN THE NATIONAL SYNOD OF THE REFORMED CHURCH,

Held at Dordrecht, in the years 1618 and 1619.

First head of doctrine.—Of Divine Predestination.

ARTICLE I. As all men have sinned in Adam, lie under the curse, and are obnoxious to eternal death, God would have done no injustice by leaving them all to perish, and delivering them over to condemnation on account of sin, according to the words of the Apostle, Rom. iii. 19, "that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God." And verse 23, "for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." And Rom. vi. 23, "for the wages of sin is death."

ART. II. But in this the love of God was manifested, that he sent his only begotten Son into the world, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life. 1 John iv. 9. John iii. 16.

ART. III. And that men may be brought to believe, God mercifully sends the messengers of these most joyful tidings, to whom he will, and at what time he pleaseth, by whose ministry men are called to repentance and faith in Christ crucified. Rom. x. 14, 15. "How then shall they call on him, in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him, of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent?"

ART. IV. The wrath of God abideth upon those who believe not this gospel. But such as receive it, and embrace Jesus the Saviour by a true and

living faith, are by him delivered from the wrath of God, and from destruction, and have the gift of eternal life conferred upon them.

Art. V. The cause or guilt of this unbelief, as well as of all other sins, is no wise in God, but in man himself: Whereas faith in Jesus Christ, and salvation through him, is the free gift of God, as it is written, "By grace ye are saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God." Eph. ii. 8. "And unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him," &c. Phil. i. 29.

Art. VI. That some receive the gift of faith from God, and others do not receive it, proceeds from God's eternal decree: "For known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world." Acts xv. 18; Eph. i. 11. According to which decree, he graciously softens the hearts of the elect, however obstinate, and inclines them to believe; while he leaves the non-elect, in his just judgment, to their own wickedness and obduracy. And herein is especially displayed the profound, the merciful, and at the same time the righteous discrimination between men, equally involved in ruin; or that decree of election and reprobation, revealed in the word of God, which, though men of perverse, impure, and unstable minds, wrest to their own destruction, yet to holy and pious souls affords unspeakable consolation.

Art. VII. Election is the unchangeable purpose of God, whereby, before the foundation of the world, he hath, out of mere grace, according to the sovereign good pleasure of his own will, chosen, from the whole human race, which had fallen through their own fault, from their primitive state of rectitude, into sin and destruction, a certain number of persons to redemption in Christ, whom he from eternity appointed the Mediator and head of the elect, and the foundation of salvation.

This elect number, though by nature neither better nor more deserving than others, but with them involved in one common misery, God hath decreed to give to Christ, to be saved by him, and effectually to call and draw them to his communion by his word and Spirit, to bestow upon them true faith, justification, and sanctification; and having powerfully preserved them in the fellowship of his Son, finally to glorify them for the demonstration of his mercy, and for the praise of the riches of his glorious grace, as it is written: "According as he hath chosen us in him, before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy, and without blame, before him in love; having predestinated us unto the adoption of children, by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved." Eph. i. 4, 5, 6. And elsewhere, "Whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified." Rom. viii. 30.

Art. VIII. There are not various decrees of election, but one and the same decree respecting all those who shall be saved, both under the old and new testament: since the Scripture declares the good pleasure, purpose, and counsel of the divine will to be one, according to which he hath chosen us from eternity both to grace and to glory—to salvation, and the way of salvation, which he hath ordained that we should walk therein.

Art. IX. This election was not founded upon foreseen faith, and the obedience of faith, holiness, or any other good quality or disposition in man, as the prerequisite, cause, or condition on which it depended; but men are chosen to faith, and to the obedience of faith, holiness, &c. Therefore election is the fountain of every saving good; from which proceed faith, holiness, and the other gifts of salvation, and finally eternal life itself, as its fruits

and effects, according to that of the Apostle: "He hath chosen us (not because we were) but that we should be holy, and without blame, before him in love." Ephes. i. 4.

Art. X. The good pleasure of God is the sole cause of this gracious election, which doth not consist herein, that God foreseeing all possible qualities or human actions, elected certain of these, as a condition of salvation; but that he was pleased out of the common mass of sinners to adopt some certain persons as a peculiar people to himself, as it is written: "For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, &c." "It was said (namely to Rebecca,) the elder shall serve the younger; as it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." Rom. ix. 11, 12, 13. "And as many as were ordained to eternal life believed." Acts xiii. 48.

Art. XI. And as God himself is most wise, unchangeable, omniscient, and omnipotent; so the election made by him can neither be interrupted nor changed, recalled, or annulled, neither can the elect be cast away, nor their number diminished.

Art. XII. The elect, in due time, though in various degrees and in different measures, attain the assurance of this their eternal and unchangeable election, not by inquisitively prying into the secret and deep things of God; but by observing in themselves, with a spiritual joy and holy pleasure, the infallible fruits of election pointed out in the word of God: Such as a true faith in Christ, filial fear, a godly sorrow for sin, a hungering and thirsting after righteousness, &c.

Art. XIII. The sense and certainty of this election afford to the children of God additional matter for daily humiliation before him, for adoring the depth of his mercies, aad rendering grateful returns of ardent love to him, who first manifested so great love toward them. The consideration of this doc-

trine of election is so far from encouraging remissness in the observance of the divine commands, or from sinking men in carnal security, that these, in the just judgment of God, are the usual effects of rash presumption, or of idle and wanton trifling with the grace of election, in those who refuse to walk in the ways of the elect.

Art. XIV. As the doctrine of divine election, by the most wise counsel of God, was declared by the prophets, by Christ himself, and by the Apostles, and is clearly revealed in the scriptures both of the old and new testament; so it is still to be published in due time and place in the church of God, for which it was peculiarly designed, provided it be done with reverence, in the spirit of discretion and piety, for the glory of God's most holy name, and for enlivening and comforting his people, without vainly attempting to investigate the secret ways of the Most High.

Art. XV. What peculiarly tends to illustrate and recommend to us the eternal and unmerited grace of election, is the express testimony of sacred Scripture, that not all, but some only are elected, while others are passed by in the eternal decree; whom God, out of his sovereign, most just, irreprehensible, and unchangeable good pleasure, hath decreed to leave in the common misery into which they have wilfully plunged themselves, and not to bestow upon them saving faith, and the grace of conversion; but permitting them in his just judgment to follow their own ways, at last for the declaration of his justice, to condemn and punish them for ever, not only on account of their unbelief, but also for all their other sins. And this is the decree of reprobation, which by no means makes God the author of sin, (the very thought of which is blasphemy,) but declares him to be an awful, irreprehensible, and righteous judge, and avenger.

Art. XVI. Those who do not yet experience a lively faith in Christ, an assured confidence of soul, peace of conscience, an earnest endeavour after filial obedience, and glorifying in God through Christ efficaciously wrought in them, and do nevertheless persist in the use of the means which God hath appointed for working these graces in us, ought not to be alarmed at the mention of reprobation, nor to rank themselves among the reprobate, but diligently to persevere in the use of means, and with ardent desires devoutly and humbly to wait for a season of richer grace. Much less cause have they to be terrified by the doctrine of reprobation: who, though they seriously desire to be turned to God, to please him only, and to be delivered from the body of death, cannot yet reach that measure of holiness and faith to which they aspire; since a merciful God has promised that he will not quench the smoaking flax, nor break the bruised reed. But this doctrine is justly terrible to those, who, regardless of God, and of the Saviour Jesus Christ, have wholly given themselves up to the cares of the world, and the pleasures of the flesh, so long as they are not seriously converted to God.

Art. XVII. Since we are to judge of the will of God from his word, which testifies that the children of believers are holy, not by nature, but in virtue of the covenant of grace, in which they, together with the parents, are comprehended, godly parents have no reason to doubt of the election, and salvation of their children, whom it pleaseth God to call out of this life in their infancy.

Art. XVIII. To those who murmur at the free grace of election, and just severity of reprobation, we answer with the Apostle: "Nay; but O! man, who art thou that repliest against God?" Rom. ix. 20: And quote the language of our Saviour, "Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own." Mat. xx. 15. And therefore, with holy

adoration of these mysteries, we exclaim in the words of the Apostle: "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen."

Second head of doctrine.—Of the death of Christ, and the redemption of men thereby.

Article I. God is not only supremely merciful, but also supremely just. And his justice requires, as he hath revealed himself in his word, that our sins, committed against his infinite majesty, should be punished not only with temporal, but with eternal punishments, both in body and soul; which we cannot escape, unless satisfaction be made to the justice of God.

Art. II. Since therefore we are unable to make that satisfaction in our own persons, or to deliver ourselves from the wrath of God, he hath been pleased of his infinite mercy to give his only begotten Son, for our Surety, who was made sin, and became a curse for us, and in our stead, that he might make satisfaction to divine justice on our behalf.

Art. III. The death of the Son of God is the only and most perfect sacrifice, and satisfaction for sin—is of infinite worth and value—abundantly sufficient to expiate the sins of the whole world.

Art. IV. This death derives its infinite value and dignity from these considerations; because the person who submitted to it was not only really man, and perfectly holy, but also the only begotten Son of God, of the same eternal and infinite essence with the Father, and Holy Spirit, which qualifications

were necessary to constitute him a Saviour for us; and because it was attended with a sense of the wrath and curse of God, due to us for sin.

Art. V. Moreover the promise of the gospel is, that whosoever believeth in Christ crucified, should not perish, but have everlasting life. This promise, together with the command to repent and believe, ought to be declared and published to all nations, and to all persons promiscuously and without distinction, to whom God out of his good pleasure sends the gospel.

Art. VI. And, whereas many who are called by the gospel, do not repent, nor believe in Christ, but perish in unbelief: This is not owing to any defect or insufficiency in the sacrifice offered by Christ upon the cross, but is wholly to be imputed to themselves.

Art. VII. But as many as truly believe, and are delivered and saved from sin and destruction through the death of Christ, are indebted for this benefit solely to the grace of God given them in Christ from everlasting, and not to any merit of their own.

Art. VIII. For this was the sovereign counsel, and most gracious will and purpose of God the Father, that the quickening and saving efficacy of the most precious death of his Son should extend to all the elect, for bestowing upon them alone the gift of justifying faith, thereby to bring them infallibly to salvation: that is, it was the will of God, that Christ by the blood of the cross, whereby he confirmed the new covenant, should effectually redeem out of every people, tribe, nation, and language, all those, and those only, who were from eternity chosen to salvation, and given to him, by the Father; that he should confer upon them faith, which, together with all the other saving gifts of the Holy Spirit, he purchased for them by his death; should purge them from all sin, both original and actual, whether committed before or after believing; and having faith

fully preserved them even to the end, should at last bring them free from every spot and blemish to the enjoyment of glory in his own presence for ever.

Art. IX. This purpose, proceeding from everlasting love towards the elect, has from the beginning of the world to this day been powerfully accomplished, and will hence forward still continue to be accomplished, notwithstanding all the ineffectual opposition of the gates of hell: so that the elect in due time may be gathered together into one, and that there never may be wanting a church composed of believers, the foundation of which is laid in the blood of Christ, which may stedfastly love, and faithfully serve him as their Saviour, who, as a bridegroom for his bride, laid down his life for them upon the cross, and which may celebrate his praises here and through all eternity.

The third and fourth heads of doctrine.—Of the corruption of man, his conversion to God, and the manner thereof.

Article. I. Man was originally formed after the image of God. His understanding was adorned with a true and saving knowledge of his Creator, and of spiritual things; his heart and will were upright; all his affections pure; and the whole man was holy: But revolting from God by the instigation of the devil, and abusing the freedom of his own will, he forfeited these excellent gifts; and, on the contrary, entailed on himself blindness of mind, horrible darkness, vanity, and perverseness of judgment; became wicked, rebellious, and obdurate in heart and will, and impure in his affections.

Art. II. Man after the fall begat children in his own likeness. A corrupt stock produced a corrupt offspring. Hence all the posterity of Adam, Christ only excepted, have derived corruption from their *original* parent, not by imitation, as the Pelagians of

old asserted, but by the propagation of a vicious nature.

Art. III. Therefore all men are conceived in sin, and by nature children of wrath, incapable of any saving good, prone to evil, dead in sin, and in bondage thereto, and without the regenerating grace of the Holy Spirit, they are neither able nor willing to return to God, to reform the depravity of their nature, nor to dispose themselves to reformation.

Art. IV. There remain however in man since the fall, the glimmerings of natural light, whereby he retains some knowledge of God, of natural things, and of the difference between good and evil, and discovers some regard for virtue, good order in society, and for maintaining an orderly external deportment. But so far is this light of nature from being sufficient to bring him to a saving knowledge of God, and to true conversion, that he is incapable of using it aright, even in things natural and civil. Nay, farther; this light, such as it is, man in various ways renders wholly polluted, and holds it in unrighteousness; by doing which he becomes inexcusable before God.

Art. V. In the same light are we to consider the law of the decalogue, delivered by God to his peculiar people the Jews, by the hands of Moses. For though it discovers the greatness of sin, and more and more convinces man thereof; yet as it neither points out a remedy, nor imparts strength to extricate him from misery; and thus, being weak through the flesh, leaves the transgressor under the curse, man cannot by this law obtain saving grace.

Art. VI. What therefore neither the light of nature, nor the law could do, that God performs by the operation of his Holy Spirit through the word or ministry of reconciliation, which is the glad tidings concerning the Messiah, by means whereof it hath pleased God to save such as believe, as well under the old, as under the new testament.

Art. VII. This mystery of his will God discovered to but a small number under the old testament; under the new, he reveals it to many. without any distinction of people. The cause of this dispensation is not to be ascribed to the superior worth of one nation above another, nor to their making a better use of the light of nature, but results wholly from the sovereign good pleasure, and unmerited love of God. Hence they, to whom so great and so gracious a blessing is communicated, above their desert, or rather notwithstanding their demerits, are bound to acknowledge it with humble and grateful hearts; and, with the Apostle, to adore, not curiously to pry into the severity and justice of God's judgments displayed in others, to whom this grace is not given.

Art. VIII. As many as are called by the gospel, are unfeignedly called. For God hath most earnestly and truly declared in his word what will be acceptable to him; namely, that all who are called should comply with the invitation. He moreover seriously promises eternal life and rest to as many as shall come to him, and believe on him.

Art. IX. It is not the fault of the gospel, nor of Christ offered therein, nor of God, who calls men by the gospel, and confers upon them various gifts, that those who are called by the ministry of the word refuse to come, and be converted, the fault lies in themselves: Some of whom when called, regardless of their danger, reject the word of life; others, though they receive it, suffer it not to make a lasting impression on their heart: Therefore, their joy, arising only from a temporary faith, soon vanishes, and they fall away; while others choak the seed of the word by perplexing cases, and the pleasures of this world, and produce no fruit. This our Saviour teaches in the parable of the sower. Mat. 13.

Art. X. But that others who are called by the

gospel, obey the call, and are converted, is not to be ascribed to the proper exercise of free will, whereby on distinguishes himself above others, equally furnished with grace sufficient for faith and conversion, as the proud heresy of Pelagius maintains; but it must be wholly to God, who, as he hath chosen his own from eternity in Christ, so he confers upon them faith and repentance, rescues them from the power of darkness, and translates them into the kingdom of his own Son, that they may shew forth the praises of him, who hath called them out of darkness into this marvellous light; and may glory not in themselves, but in the Lord, according to the testimony of the Apostles in various places.

Art. XI. But when God accomplishes his good pleasure in the elect, or works in them true conversion, he not only causes the gospel to be externally preached to them, and powerfully illuminates their minds by his Holy Spirit, that they may rightly understand and discern the things of the Spirit of God; but by the efficacy of the same regenerating spirit, pervades the inmost recesses of the man: He opens the closed, and softens the hardened heart, and circumcises that which was uncircumcised; infuses new qualities into the will, which, though heretofore dead, he quickens, from being evil, disobedient, and refractory; he renders it good, obedient, and pliable; actuates and strengthens it, that, like a good tree, it may bring forth the fruits of good actions.

Art. XII. And this is the regeneration so highly celebrated in Scripture, and denominated a new creation; a resurrection from the dead; a making alive; which God works in us without our aid. But this is no wise effected merely by the external preaching of the gospel, by moral suasion, or such a mode of operation, that, after God has performed his part, it still remains in the power of man to be regenerated or not—to be converted, or to continue unconverted; but it is evidently a supernatural

work, most powerful, and at the same time most delightful, astonishing, mysterious, and ineffable; not inferior in efficacy to creation, or the resurrection from the dead, as the Scripture, inspired by the Author of this work, declares; so that in all whose hearts God works in this marvellous manner, are certainly infallibly, and effectually regenerated, and do actually believe. Whereupon the will thus renewed is not only actuated and influenced by God, but in consequence of this influence becomes itself active. Wherefore also man is himself rightly said to believe and repent, by virtue of that grace received.

Art. XIII. The manner of this operation cannot be fully comprehended by believers in this life. Notwithstanding which they rest satisfied with knowing and experiencing that, by this grace of God, they are enabled to believe with the heart, and love their Saviour.

Art. XIV. Faith is therefore to be considered as the gift of God, not on account of its being offered by God to man, to be accepted or rejected at his pleasure; but because it is in reality conferred, breathed, and infused into him; nor even because God bestows the power or ability to believe, and then expects that man should by the exercise of his own free will consent to the terms of salvation, and actually believe in Christ; but because he who works in man both to will and to do, and indeed all things in all, produces both the will to believe, and the act of believing also.

Art. XV. God is under no obligation to confer this grace upon any; for how can he be indebted to man, who had no previous gift to bestow, as a foundation for such recompense? Nay, who has nothing of his own, but sin and falsehood? He therefore who becomes the subject of this grace, owes eternal gratitude to God, and gives him thanks for ever. Whoever is not made partaker thereof, is either al-

together regardless of these spiritual gifts, and satisfied with his own condition, or is in no apprehension of danger, and vainly boasts the possession of that which he has not. With respect to those who make an external profession of faith, and live regular lives, we are bound, after the example of the Apostle, to judge and speak of them in the most favourable manner. For the secret recesses of the heart are unknown to us. And as to others who have not yet been called, it is our duty to pray for them to God, who calls the things that are not, as if they were. But we are in no wise to conduct ourselves towards them with haughtiness, as if we had made ourselves to differ.

Art. XVI. But as man by the fall did not cease to be a creature, endowed with understanding and will, nor did sin, which pervaded the whole race of mankind, deprive him of the human nature, but brought upon him depravity, and spiritual death; so also this grace of regeneration, does not heat men as senseless stocks and blocks, nor takes away their will and its properties, neither does violence thereto; but spiritually quickens, heals, corrects, and at the same time sweetly and powerfully bends it: that where carnal rebellion and resistance formerly prevailed, a ready and sincere spiritual obedience begins to reign; in which the true and spiritual restoration and freedom of our will consist. Wherefore unless the admirable author of every good work wrought in us, man could have no hope of recovering from his fall by his own free will, by the abuse of which in a state of innocence he plunged himself into ruin.

Art. XVII. As the almighty operation of God, whereby he prolongs and supports this our natural life, does not exclude, but requires the use of means, by which God of his infinite mercy and goodness hath chosen to exert his influence: so also the beforementioned supernatural operation of God,

by which we are regenerated, in no wise excludes or subverts the use of the gospel, which the most wise God has ordained to be the seed of regeneration, and food of the soul. Wherefore as the Apostles and teachers, who succeeded them, piously instructed the people concerning this grace of God, to his glory, and the abasement of all pride; and in the meantime, however, neglected not to keep them by the sacred precepts of the gospel in the exercise of the word, sacraments, and discipline: so even to this day, be it far from either instructors or instructed to presume to tempt God in the Church, by separating what he of his good pleasure hath most intimately joined together. For grace is conferred by means of admonitions, and the more readily we perform our duty, the more eminent usually is this blessing of God working in us, and the more directly is his work advanced, to whom alone all the glory both of means and their saving fruit and efficacy is for ever due. Amen.

The fifth head of doctrine.—Of the perseverance of the saints.

Article I. Whom God calls, according to his purpose, to the communion of his Son our Lord Jesus Christ, and regenerates by the Holy Spirit, he delivers also from the dominion and slavery of sin in this life, though not altogether from the body of sin, and from the infirmities of the flesh, so long as they continue in this world.

Art. II. Hence spring daily sins of infirmity, and hence spots adhere to the best works of the saints; which furnish them with constant matter for humiliation before God, and flying for refuge to Christ crucified, for mortifying the flesh more and more by the spirit of prayer, and by holy exercises of piety, and for pressing forward to the goal of perfection, till being at length delivered from this body

of death, they are brought to reign with the Lamb of God in heaven.

Art. III. By reason of these remains of indwelling sin, and the temptations of sin and of the world, those who are converted could not persevere in a state of grace, if left to their own strength. But God is faithful, who having conferred grace, mercifully confirms them, and powerfully preserves them therein, even to the end.

Art. IV. Although the weakness of the flesh cannot prevail against the power of God, who confirms and preserves true believers in a state of grace, yet converts are not always so influenced and actuated by the Spirit of God, as not in some particular instances sinfully to deviate from the guidance of divine grace, so as to be seduced by and comply with the lusts of the flesh; they must therefore be constant in watching and prayer, that they be not led into temptation. When these are neglected, they are not only liable to be drawn into great and heinous sins, by Satan, the world, and the flesh; but sometimes, by the righteous permission of God, fall into these evils. This, the lamentable fall of David, Peter, and other saints, described in Holy Scripture, demonstrates.

Art. V. By such enormous sins, however, they very highly offend God—incur a deadly guilt—grieve the Holy Spirit—interrupt the exercise of faith—very grievously wound their conscience—and sometimes lose the sense of God's favour, for a time, until, on their returning into the right way by serious repentance, the light of God's fatherly countenance again shines upon them.

Art. VI. But God, who is rich in mercy, according to his unchangeable purpose of election, does not wholly withdraw the Holy Spirit from his own people, even in their melancholy falls, nor suffers them to proceed so far as to lose the grace of adoption, and forfeit the state of justification; or to

commit the sin unto death; nor does he permit them to be totally deserted, and to plunge themselves into everlasting destruction.

Art. VII. For, in the first place, in these falls he preserves in them the incorruptible seed of regeneration from perishing, or being totally lost; and again, by his word and spirit, certainly and effectually renews them to repentance, to a sincere and godly sorrow for their sins, that they may seek and obtain remission in the blood of the Mediator—may again experience the favour of a reconciled God—through faith adore his mercies—and henceforward more diligently work out their own salvation with fear and trembling.

Art. VIII. Thus it is not in consequence of their own merits or strength, but of God's free mercy that they do not totally fall from faith and grace, nor continue and perish finally in their backslidings; which, with respect to themselves, is not only possible, but would undoubtedly happen; but, with respect to God, it is utterly impossible, since his counsel cannot be changed, nor his promise fail, neither can the call according to his purpose be revoked, nor the merit, intercession, and preservation of Christ be rendered ineffectual, nor the sealing of the Holy Spirit be frustrated or obliterated.

Art. IX. Of this preservation of the elect to salvation, and of their perseverance in the faith, true believers for themselves may and do obtain assurance according to the measure of their faith, whereby they arrive at the certain persuasion that they ever will continue true and living members of the church; and that they experience forgiveness of sins, and will at last inherit eternal life.

Art. X. This assurance, however, is not produced by any peculiar revelation contrary to, or independent of the word of God; but springs from faith in God's promises, which he has most abundantly revealed in his word for our comfort,

from the testimony of the Holy Spirit, witnessing with our spirit, that we are children and heirs of God, Rom. viii. 16; and, lastly, from a serious and holy desire to preserve a good conscience, and to perform good works. And if the elect of God were deprived of this solid comfort, that they shall finally obtain the victory, and of this infallible pledge or earnest of eternal glory, they would be of all men the most miserable.

Art. XI. The Scripture moreover testifies, that believers in this life have to struggle with various carnal doubts; and that, under grievous temptations, they are not always sensible of this full assurance of faith, and certainty of persevering. But God, who is the father of all consolation, does not suffer them to be tempted above that they are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that they may be able to bear it, 1 Cor. x. 13; and, by the Holy Spirit, again inspires them with the comfortable assurance of persevering.

Art. XII. This certainty of perseverance, however, is so far from exciting in believers a spirit of pride, or of rendering them carnally secure, that, on the contrary, it is the real source of humility, filial reverence, true piety, patience in every tribulation, fervent prayers, constancy in suffering, and in confessing the truth, and of solid rejoicing in God: so that the consideration of this benefit should serve as an incentive to the serious and constant practice of gratitude and good works, as appears from the testimonies of Scripture, and the examples of the saints.

Art. XIII. Neither does renewed confidence of persevering produce licentiousness, or a disregard to piety in those who are recovered from backsliding; but it renders them much more careful and solicitous to continue in the ways of the Lord, which he hath ordained that they who walk therein may maintain an assurance of persevering, lest, by abusing his fatherly kindness, God should turn away his

gracious countenance from them,—to behold which is to the godly dearer than life; the withdrawing thereof is more bitter than death: and they, in consequence hereof, should fall into more grievous torments of conscience.

Art. XIV. And as it hath pleased God, by the preaching of the gospel, to begin this work of grace in us; so he preserves, continues, and perfects it, by the hearing and reading of his word, by meditation thereon, and by the exhortations, threatenings, and promises thereof, as well as by the use of the sacraments.

Art. XV. The carnal mind is unable to comprehend this doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, and the certainty thereof, which God hath most abundantly revealed in his word, for the glory of his name, and the consolation of pious souls, and which he impresses upon the hearts of the faithful: Satan abhors it—the world ridicules it—the ignorant and hypocrite abuse—and heretics oppose it: But the spouse of Christ hath always most tenderly loved and constantly defended it, as an inestimable treasure: And God, against whom neither counsel nor strength can prevail, will dispose her to continue this conduct to the end.—Now to this one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be honour and glory for ever. Amen.

CONCLUSION.

And this is the perspicuous, simple, and ingenuous declaration of the orthodox doctrine, respecting the five articles, which have been controverted in the Belgic churches; and the rejection of the errors with which they have for some time been troubled. This doctrine, the Synod judges to be drawn from the word of God, and to be agreeeable to the confessions of the Reformed Churches,

Whence it clearly appears, that some, whom such conduct by no means became, have violated all truth, equity, and charity, in wishing to persuade the public "that the doctrine of the Reformed Churches, concerning predestination, and the points annexed to it, by its own genius and necessary tendency, leads off the minds of men from all piety and religion—that it is an opiate, administered by the flesh and the devil, and the strong hold of Satan, where he lies in wait for all, and from which he wounds multitudes, and mortally strikes through many with the darts both of despair and security,—that it makes God the author of sin, unjust, tyrannical, hypocritical,—that it is nothing more than interpolated Stoicism, Manicheism, Libertinism, Turcism,—that it renders men carnally secure, since they are persuaded by it that nothing can hinder the salvation of the elect, let them live as they please; and therefore that they may safely perpetrate every species of the most atrocious crimes; and that if the reprobate should even perform truly all the works of the saints, their obedience would not in the least contribute to their salvation;—that the same doctrine teaches, that God, by a mere arbitrary act of his will, without the least respect or view to any sin, has predestinated the greatest part of the world to eternal damnation; and has created them for this very purpose;—that in the same manner in which election is the fountain and cause of faith and good works, reprobation is the cause of unbelief and impiety:—that many children of the faithful are torn, guiltless, from their mother's breasts, and tyrannically plunged into hell; so that neither baptism, nor the prayers of the church at their baptism, can at all profit them!" And many other things of the same kind, which the Reformed Churches not only do not acknowledge—but even detest with their whole soul!

Wherefore, this Synod of Dort, in the name of the Lord, conjures, as many as piously call upon the name of our Saviour Jesus Christ, to judge of the faith of the Reformed Churches—not from the calumnies which, on every side, are heaped upon it—nor from the private expressions of a few among ancient and modern teachers, often dishonestly quoted, or corrupted, and wrested to a meaning quite foreign to their intention; but from the public confessions of the churches themselves, and from this declaration of the orthodox doctrine, confirmed by the unanimous consent of all and each of the members of the whole Synod. Moreover, the Synod warns calumniators themselves, to consider the terrible judgment of God which awaits them for bearing false witness against the confessions of so many churches—for distressing the consciences of the weak—and for labouring to render suspected the society of the truly faithful.

Finally; this Synod exhorts all their brethren in the gospel of Christ, to conduct themselves piously and religiously in handling this doctrine, both in the universities and churches; to direct it, as well in discourse, as in writing, to the glory of the divine name, to holiness of life, and to the consolation of afflicted souls; to regulate by the Scripture, according to the analogy of faith, not only their sentiments, but also their language; and to abstain from all those phrases which exceed the limits necessary to be observed in ascertaining the genuine sense of the Holy Scriptures; and may furnish insolent sophists with a just pretext for violently assailing, or even vilifying, the doctrine of the Reformed Churches.

May Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who, seated at the Father's right hand, gives gifts to men, sanctify us in the truth—bring to the truth those who err—shut the mouths of the calumniators of sound doc-

trine—and endue the faithful ministers of his word with the spirit of wisdom and discretion, that all their discourses may tend to the glory of God, and the edification of those who hear them. Amen.

ETERNAL ELECTION, MATTER OF PRAISE;

A SERMON, &c.

But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren, beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth; whereunto he called you by our gospel to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. 2 Thess. ii. 13, 14.

"ALL Scripture," my brethren, "is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."* Every doctrine, and every lesson of Scripture, must therefore be a proper theme of discourse.

Were the doctrine contained in the text improper or useless,—were it a doctrine which ought to be kept out of sight, and not insisted on in public,—we may rest assured, that it would not have occupied a place in the sacred volume; all of which was given by *inspiration*, and all of which is *useful* and *necessary* to be known.

---

* 2 Tim. iii. 16, 17.

The opposition of men to the doctrine of DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY, can never justify the ministers of the gospel in concealing the truth from public view. Their duty is to *declare all the counsel of God;* and *cursed is he who doeth the work of the Lord deceitfully.* Those who have embarked in the cause of the church ought to possess sufficient courage and fortitude to brave the storm of opposition and reproach. Influenced by the fear of God, and exercising a becoming confidence in their Master, their business is to preach the truth, *whether men will hear, or whether they will forbear.* "Whatever, therefore," says Calvin,* "is declared in the Scripture concerning predestination, we must be cautious not to withhold from the faithful, lest we appear either to defraud them of the favour of their God—or to reprove and censure the Holy Spirit, for publishing what it would be useful by any means to suppress."

The preaching of Christ himself, although he spake as never man spake, offended many of his hearers; and no doctrine which he advanced was more offensive to them than the doctrine of divine sovereignty! We are expressly told, by the Evangelist John in his sixth chapter, that, because Christ taught the freeness and efficacy of divine grace in choosing and calling and saving the elect, *many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.*

From these observations, every one, who has charity to believe the preacher sincere, will conclude, that a sense of duty, and not a desire to irritate or offend, has induced him to call your attention to a leading—and, as he verily believes, a most important, and encouraging doctrine, of the gospel system He asks nothing, but candid, impartial attention: He claims nothing but a right to advance

* Institutes, vol. ii. p. 417. New Haven, 1816.

and support his own views of the Bible revelation: He aims at nothing, as he trusts, but the glory of God, in the illustration and vindication of a doctrine, which, more than any other, places the crown on Jehovah's head—which stains the pride of human glory—and which teaches him *that glorieth, to glory in the Lord.*

"He that hath ears to hear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches!" "But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren, beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth; whereunto he has called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."

These words exhibit, for consideration,

I. The *end* which God has in view, with respect to some sinners of the human family,—viz. THEIR SALVATION. *He has chosen them from the beginning to salvation, and to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

II. The *means*, by which this end is accomplished: *Through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth; whereunto he hath called you by our gospel.*

III. The gratitude, with which this arrangement of infinite wisdom and mercy, ought to fill our minds. *We are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren, beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation.*

I. Our text exhibits for consideration the end which God has in view, with respect to some sinners,—viz. *their salvation.* "He hath from the beginning chosen them to salvation," and "to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."

That God has *some end* in view in all his works is a self evident truth. To suppose, that an intelligent Being acts without design is absurd in the extreme! If a man, while busily employed, should

tell us—'I know not what I am doing: I have no object in view: I am working without design:'—we would, at once, pronounce him deficient in intellect! And surely, then, it is not to be supposed, that the infinite God, *whose understanding is unsearchable; who is light, and in whom there is no darkness at all*, has created this world, and stocked it with its various tribes of inhabitants, without knowing why he did so?—without having any end in view?—or without knowing what would be the movements and the destiny of the creatures of his power? His word informs us, that he "declares the end from the beginning; and from ancient times the things that are not yet done—saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure!"* "For the Lord of Hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul it? And his hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back?"† "He worketh all things after the counsel of his own will!"‡

But, if God has fixed his plans in eternity—and now works ALL things after the counsel of his own will—his decrees must necessarily have respect to the final condition of men! He has purposed who shall be raised up as monuments of his grace, and who shall be suffered to go on in their sins, and work out their own destruction.

But, again; the prescience or foreknowledge of God is generally admitted; and the fact, that so many prophecies are found in the sacred volume, which have received exact fulfilment long after they were recorded, is sufficient evidence, both that God *knows the end from the beginning*, and that he so controls every creature and every event, as to secure the execution of his righteous designs. "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world."§

---

* Isa. xlvi. 10. † Isa. xiv. 27. ‡ Eph. i. 11.
§ Acts xv. 18.

But how does God foreknow what ever does, or shall take place? Nothing can be certainly foreknown which is uncertain in its nature; and nothing but the purpose of God can render what is future, certain. "It cannot be imagined (says an excellent writer,) whence he should have such a foreknowledge, but from his own decree: He foreknew such and such events, because he decreed they should come to pass. As he sees all things possible in his own power; so he sees all things future in his own will and decree; and he sees the nature of things in the eternal ideas in his own mind."* This foreknowledge, founded on decrees, has respect to all things—and consequently includes our final condition. God knows who shall be saved! and he knows it in virtue of his eternal, unchangeable decree.

Once more: God is immutable. *He is the Lord, that changeth not—the Father of lights—with whom there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.* No new thoughts can arise in his mind,—no new plans can be adopted by him. If God is to know more one year, or ten years hence, than he does at present: If he at that time is to have different plans, from what he has at present, he must himself become a different, and a more perfect Being. Either God must change, or else his purposes must be fixed and eternal. God cannot be the infinitely perfect and unchangeable Jehovah, unless he has decreed whatever comes to pass!—and, of course, who shall, and who shall not be saved!

These views of decrees in general, and of predestination in particular, are supported by the best and highest authorities. The wisest among the heathen acknowledged the purposes of God; and Seneca† expressly refers to them, as a remedy against impa-

* Wishart's discourses of God, vol. ii. p. 74.

† Ep. 96, as quoted by Wishart, vol. ii. p. 74.

dience under afflictions. 'Losses (says he) wounds, pains, fears, have made an incursion upon you: These things are usual: That is little: These things must needs come to pass: They are *decreed*, and do not come by chance!' But we have higher authority than that which is drawn from the annals of pagan philosophy: We have *a more sure word of prophecy;* and we say, in relation to this, as well as every other article of faith, "to the law, and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them."*

The decisions of Scripture are final; from them there is no appeal. Unless this principle be adopted and acted upon, we can expect nothing like uniformity of sentiment in the Christian world. The conclusions drawn by our reason may, and no doubt will be various; and if every one is to believe only what to him appears reasonable, the Bible, instead of being *a light to our feet, and a lamp to our path* in the investigation of moral truth, becomes a dead letter—a mere blank. Our reason and our feelings, disordered and vitiated by the fall, are not infallible guides: And yet it is a well known fact, that men's ideas of right and wrong—the unsanctified notions of a rebellious heart, and not the authority of God's word—are the pleas urged against the doctrine under consideration. It is a warfare, carried on with artillery drawn not from Scripture, but from the human heart—a magazine, full of enmity against God and his truth.

We readily admit, that there are in Scripture passages of doubtful interpretation; some of which may be supposed to militate against the doctrine for which we contend. But is it candid—is it honourable—is it just—to set up passages of doubtful construction, in opposition to plain and unequivocal declarations? Surely, one plain and pointed declara-

* Isa. viii. 20.

tion in favour or against any doctrine, will weigh down all the doubtful passages that can possibly be collected? Is there then, we ask, any plain and unequivocal passages of Scripture against the doctrine of predestination? The most bitter opposers of the doctrine must acknowledge, there is not; while the advocates of the doctrine can refer to a host of passages—and say, with confidence, *thus saith the Lord.*

A few of these passages we beg leave to introduce, to show you that those who reject this doctrine, reject it at their peril—and that the controversy is not between them and the preacher, but between them and the Bible—between them and the God of the Bible; and "wo to him who striveth with his Maker."* The passages we design to mention are plain and conclusive, and such as altogether supersede the necessity of a tedious enumeration. Acts xiii. 48. "And when the Gentiles heard this they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord; and as many as were *ordained to eternal life* believed." Rom. viii. 33: "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's *elect?* It is God that justifieth." Rom. ix. 11, 12, 13: "For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the *purpose of God, according to election,* might stand; not of works, but of him that calleth. It was said unto her, the elder shall serve the younger; as it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." Eph. i. 4, 5: "According as he hath *chosen us in him before the foundation of the world,* that we should be holy, and without blame before him in love: Having *predestinated* us unto the adoption of children, by Jesus Christ, to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will." 1 Peter i. 2: "*Elect,* according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of

* Isa. xlv. 9.

the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ."

See, my brethren, how explicit, how very explicit, Scripture is upon this subject; and yet half the passages, which prove this doctrine, have not been enumerated. Indeed, it is a doctrine which runs through the whole of the Bible. Such being the fact, is it surprising that this doctrine is so clearly recognized in the standards of the Churches of the Reformation; and that they not only maintain, in general, that "God from all eternity did, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass;"* but, in particular, that he has in eternity made choice of the heirs of salvation.

Let us look at our own [Belgic] confession of faith:† "We believe, that all the posterity of Adam, being thus fallen into perdition and ruin, by the sin of our first parents, that God then did manifest himself such as he is; that is to say, merciful and just: *Merciful*, since he delivers and preserves from this perdition all whom he, in his eternal and unchangeable counsel of mere goodness, hath elected in Christ Jesus our Lord, without any respect to their works: *Just*, in leaving others in the fall and perdition, wherein they have involved themselves." In the *canons of the Synod of Dort*,‡ you may find a still more full and explicit expression of the *faith of the Reformed Dutch Church* on this article. With our own confession of faith, that of the *Westminster Assembly of Divines*, adopted by the Presbyterian, the Associate, the Associate Reformed, and Reformed Presbyterian Churches, of this country, perfectly agrees:§ "By the decree of God for the manifestation of his glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others

* Westminster Confession of Faith, chap. iii. art. 1.
† Article xvi. ‡ First head of doctrine.
§ Chap. iii. art. 3, 4, 5.

foreordained to everlasting death. These angels and men, thus predestinated and foreordained, are particularly and unchangeably designed; and their number is so certain and definite, that it cannot be either increased or diminished. Those of mankind that are predestinated unto life, God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to his eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel and good pleasure of his will, hath chosen in Christ, unto everlasting glory, out of his mere free grace and love, without any foresight of faith or good works, or perseverance in either of them, or any other thing in the creature, as conditions or causes moving him thereunto; and all to the praise of his glorious grace."

This very same article is found in the confession of faith agreed on, by the Puritans of England, in their Synod at Savoy; and adopted by the New England Churches, met in Synod at Boston, in 1680.* The Church of England, too—although in our day the doctrine of predestination is disowned and opposed by a majority of her clergy, and her members, both in Europe and this country—still retains the memorial of her ancient purity, by suffering the seventeenth article to hold its place in her THIRTY-NINE ARTICLES OF RELIGION: "Predestination to life is the everlasting purpose of God, whereby (before the foundations of the world were laid) he hath constantly decreed, by his counsel, secret to us, to deliver from curse and damnation those whom he hath chosen in Christ out of mankind, and to bring them by Christ to everlasting salvation, as vessels made to honour. Wherefore they which be endued with so excellent a benefit of God, be called according to God's purpose, by his Spirit working in due season; they through grace obey the

* Mather's Magnalia, vol. ii. p. 160. Chap. iii. art. 3, 4. and 5.

calling: they be justified freely: they be made sons of God by adoption: they be made like the image of his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ: they walk religiously in good works; and at length, by God's mercy, they attain to everlasting felicity."

Thus have I given you, in addition to Scripture testimony, a view of the confessions of different churches, to convince you that the doctrine of predestination is a doctrine of the Reformation; and of our own confession, in particular, to convince you, that no man can with truth say, at the baptism of his child, or at any other time, *I believe the doctrines of this church*, without believing the doctrine of eternal, personal, and unconditional election—viz. "that God has from the beginning chosen some to salvation, and to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."

But, now some are ready to say, 'We may eat, drink, and be merry: We may live as we please: Our destiny is inevitably fixed: And as our conduct cannot alter the eternal purposes of Jehovah, the elect will be saved, no matter how they live! The reprobate must be damned, no matter what they do!'—Nay; my brethren, do not pervert and abuse the truth. What says Scripture? What say the confessions of faith to which we have referred? Are the elect chosen to live and die, and be saved *in sin?* Directly the reverse! The elect are chosen to be holy; to be separate from sin, and sinners; and to be made meet, by the grace of God, "to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light."

II. But this introduces the second head of discourse; viz. *the means, by which the end that God has in view, with respect to some sinners, is accomplished.* "Through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth; whereunto he hath called you by our gospel."

The wisdom of God has its principle exercise in making choice of the best *ends*, and the best *means*

to accomplish those ends; and in nothing, perhaps, do men display more blindness and enmity, in relation to the truth, than by overlooking the established connexion between ends and means, in the decrees of Jehovah. The system of divine decrees is not made up of ends, without any reference to the means by which those ends are to be secured: It is a system of *ends*, connected with *means*, which are suited, and, by the divine blessing, made effectual, to the accomplishment of those ends.—Has God chosen any unto salvation? This end is to be accomplished, not by suffering them to go on in sin; but by making them "willing in the day of his power,"* and "calling them with an holy calling, according to his own purpose and grace."† *They are chosen to salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth.* Here ends and means are beautifully connected, and the harmony between them most strikingly displayed.

From the beginning, from eternity, God had chosen some of the Thessalonians to salvation. But how were they to be saved? The unholy, the impenitent, and unbelieving, cannot enter heaven! God, therefore, determined to give them faith, and to make them holy; and thus to save them, *through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth.*

But how shall faith and holiness be communicated to them? For this, the instrumentality of the WORD must be employed. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God,"‡ "whereunto (says the text) he hath called you by our gospel." "As many (says the writer of the Acts of the Apostles) as were ordained to eternal life believed."§

Such is the representation which the word of God makes of this subject. God having in eternity

* Ps. cx. 3. † 2 Tim. i. 9. ‡ Rom. x. 17. § Acts xiii. 48.

ordained some sinners to everlasting life, in due time, and by the influence of his Holy Spirit, works faith in their hearts; and, by sanctification, prepares them for that glory, to which they were from eternity predestinated. "Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified."*

Here we at once detect *two errors*, entertained by multitudes, in relation to the doctrine of election.

1. The first error we allude to is, that faith precedes election! There are many who assent to election; but it is an election in virtue of preceding faith and repentance. 'As soon as men believe, (say such) then they are elected, and not before!' This error is nearly allied to that which makes eternal election the result of foreseen faith, and good works. Both make the choice of God dependant on some excellence, real, or foreseen, in the creature. Now our text expressly teaches, that God's choice, so far from being influenced by any excellence in the creature, is the true cause and source of all the excellence of which the creature is ever possessed. Our text does not say, 'Because ye believe, or because it was foreseen that ye would believe, therefore hath he chosen you?' But it says expressly, 'Because he hath chosen you, therefore ye believe.'—He has chosen you from the beginning; and because he has so chosen you, he has called you by the gospel, and given you his Spirit, as a spirit of faith and holiness. So God himself declares, by the Prophet Jeremiah:† "I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with loving kindness have I drawn you." We see, then, that drawing, or effectual calling, by which men are brought to the exercise of faith and repentance, is the result of eternal electing love. Faith and re-

* Rom viii. 30. † Chap. xxxi. 3.

pentance are the means by which God's purpose of election is accomplished—and, of course, cannot precede, but must be consequent on that purpose. We therefore conclude, that, while it is correct and highly proper to say that no one can have *evidence of his election* until he believes and repents, it is a gross error to say that no one *is elected* until he does believe and repent.

2. The second error we have detected is this: 'If the doctrine of election be true, the call of the gospel—the means of grace—together with all exertions on our part to be saved—are useless, if not improper!' We have already stated the connexion between the ends which God proposes to himself, and the means by which those ends are to be accomplished; and have explicitly maintained, that the preaching of the gospel is the great instrument of conversion and sanctification.

The purposes of God neither supersede the necessity of means, nor interfere with the moral agency and accountability of man.* Man, notwithstanding the decree of God, is conscious that motives influence him—and, consequently, that he acts freely. The brethren of Joseph acted freely, although their design in this transaction was widely different from that of Jehovah. "They meant it for evil; but the Lord meant it for good."† The crucifiers of our Saviour acted freely, when, with wicked hands, they

* This probably presents the greatest difficulty connected with the doctrine of Divine decrees. How the moral agency of man can consist with the predeterminations of Jehovah, we acknowledge ourselves unable to explain! But, while we make this acknowledgment, we are utterly unwilling to surrender up the truth of either. The Bible plainly asserts the doctrine of divine decrees. Our own consciousness testifies that we act from motives, and are accountable beings. Shall we then reject either, because creatures of such limited capacities as ours cannot reconcile them?—because clouds and darkness rest between them? Surely we ought not.

† Gen. l. 20.

slew the Lord of glory. But they did no more than "God's hand and counsel had before determined to be done."* Saul of Tarsus acted freely when he persecuted the saints; and Paul the Apostle acted just as freely when he *preached Christ, and him crucified.*

The gospel is, therefore, with the greatest propriety addressed to the understandings and consciences of men; with the utmost propriety are they urged to seek the salvation of their souls, by a faithful improvement of all the means of grace. God thus deals with men as rational creatures: His decree secures salvation to some—we know not to whom, or to how many: His word holds out to all a proper inducement to exert themselves to obtain the prize; and the blessing of God applied to the means gathers to himself a people, and prepares them for glory. "Mercy is thus offered to all who desire, and seek it, which none do but those whom he has enlightened; and he enlightens all whom he has predestinated to salvation."† Hence the propriety of all the exhortations, promises, and threatenings of the Bible: Hence the necessity of engagedness on our part, that, through divine assistance, we may "work out our own salvation with fear and trembling," and thus "make our calling and our election sure."

Many, disposed to wrest the Scriptures to their destruction, are indeed ready to tell us what they would do, if they believed this doctrine. 'They would give themselves no solicitude: They would patiently wait for the day of grace—or else silently and sullenly sink into hell!'

But, hearers, what say experience and observation on this point? Is it usual for those who believe the doctrine to act so? Do they cast off fear, and restrain prayer? Are they less engaged in

* Acts iv. 28. † Calvin's Inst. vol. ii. p. 482, § xvii.

seeking the favour and blessing of God, in the ways of his appointment, than others? We presume not. We know the contrary. We are not afraid to make the assertion, that those who believe the doctrine of predestination are as diligent in the use of means, and as active and faithful in the discharge of duty, as any class of men in Christendom.

And suffer me to add, that, notwithstanding all that the opposers of this doctrine may say at present, they know not how they would act if they sincerely believed it. A great change probably must take place before they will embrace this truth: That change will bring with it different views; and convince them of the necessity of conduct, far different from what they are at present aware of. I am not at all apprehensive, that submission in heart to the sovereignty of Jehovah will, in the smallest degree, lead to a practical denial of his authority, or an indifference about his glory and his favour.

It is true, that some will urge the doctrine as a pretext for indulgence in sin. They plead the doctrine, barely to abuse it. This is the most abominable of all conduct; that those who at heart disbelieve a doctrine, should still make that doctrine a plea for continuance in sin! "The preacher declares the doctrine of predestination to be true—and then it is of no consequence how we live!" But did you believe the preacher when he asserted the truth of this doctrine? If not; why do you suffer his declaration to influence your conduct? If you do not believe the doctrine, you certainly have no right to abuse it! "Go not about to palliate (says an author,)* nor think to extenuate your sin, by arguments fetched from God's decree. That sin of the Jews, in "crucifying the Lord of glory," was in no wise lessened, because the counsel of God had determined the thing to be done; for they perpe-

* Coles' Practical Discourse, p. 38. Caution ii.

trated it *with wicked hands!* Nor is men's unbelief ever the less culpable, from God's eternal disposement of their conditions; for it is not upon that consideration that they stumble at the word, or turn a deaf ear to it, or resist it; but from their own natural blindness, and enmity against it."

Let me then, in concluding this part of the discussion, again remind you, that the doctrine, as exhibited from the pulpit, and in the lives of those who cordially embrace it, is not, and cannot be prejudicial to morality and religion; but, on the contrary, must be highly favourable to both: For, as before stated, we never assert, that in consequence of election, unholy sinners may be saved. No; we assert, in the words of our text, that the elect are to be saved, "through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth," and "that they are called to this by the gospel." "According as he hath chosen us in him, before the foundation of the world, *that we should be holy, and without blame before him in love.*"* "Elect, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, *through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience, and sprinkling* of the blood of Jesus Christ."† "Ye have not chosen me; but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain."‡

The doctrine of election injurious to the cause of holiness? It is impossible. It is the spring of all holiness in men. If the doctrine of election were not true—if God had not determined to save some sinners, and here to train them up for heaven—there would be no more holiness on earth than there is in the abodes of darkness! So far, therefore, from opposing the doctrine of election, we have cause to rejoice and give thanks that the doctrine is true.

---

* Eph. i. 4. † Peter i. 2.
‡ John xv. 16.

III. But this suggests the third and last particular, which, in the discussion of our subject, claims our attention; viz. *the gratitude, with which this arrangement of infinite wisdom and mercy ought to fill our minds.* "We are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren, beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation."

That the elect are bound to praise the Lord for that distinguishing grace, which made choice of them in eternity; while the rest of the human family were left, with the company of fallen angels, to reap the fruit of their own doings, will readily be acknowledged. With equal promptness will it be admitted, that all good men, brought "out of darkness into God's marvellous light," are bound to unite with the Apostle in giving thanks, when, in the conversion of their fellow men, they discover evidence, that "God has from the beginning chosen them to salvation."

But we are disposed to carry the idea still further; and; under this head of discourse, to assert, that all, even the reprobate, are bound to give thanks to God that the doctrine of election is true! For this assertion, we assign the following reasons:

1. Because in this way holiness is restored, and preserved on earth. What would earth have been but a very hell, ever since the fall, if God had not determined to save some of our ruined race? But now, having so determined, he occupies earth as the place of preparation for heaven: Here holiness is implanted, and confirmed in the heirs of salvation; in whom, and in whom alone, is found all the holiness of which earth can boast. Now, if it be a blessing that holiness is preserved in a province of Jehovah's empire, that it be not abandoned to the uncontrolled dominion of sin, it is certainly matter of thanksgiving that the doctrine of election is true

—and that God is here forming a people for himself who shall, to all eternity, shew forth his praise.

2. All are bound to be thankful that the doctrine of election is true; because all are benefited, in a greater or less degree, by God's eternal decree of mercy. Not only are the elect infinite gainers; but the reprobate, too, are made the recipients of many blessings; and they are delivered from many calamities, because the doctrine of election is true—or, in other words, because God has a chosen people on earth, in a state of preparation for heaven. Ten righteous persons in Sodom would have saved it from destruction.* Our Saviour speaks of days of calamity, shortened for the elect's sake.† The elect are the salt of the earth, and preserve it from putrefaction. And, indeed, all the blessings of Providence, and all the mercies of life, enjoyed by the reprobate, are fruits growing out of God's purpose, to be glorified in the salvation of his chosen people. Are not all, then, bound to praise the Lord for electing love?

3. All are bound to be thankful that the doctrine of election is true, because God is glorified in his decree of predestination. The unwillingness of depraved man can never release him from the obligation to honour God—and to rejoice when he is glorified, either by himself or another. But God is glorified in the salvation of the election of grace. "This people have I formed for myself; they shall show forth my praise."‡ "To the praise of the glory of his grace."§

It is therefore the duty of all to be thankful that this doctrine is true. But, you ask, would not God have been glorified in a more eminent degree, if, instead of electing a part, he had elected the whole?

---

* Gen. xviii. 32. † Matt. xxiv. 22. ‡ Isa. xliii. 21.
§ Eph. i. 6.

I reply; God contemplates his own glory in all his purposes and operations: We may rest assured, that his purposes are the wisest, the best, and the most honourable to himself; and that his eternal purpose, by which the destiny of all intelligent creatures is fixed, is of all others best calculated to make a glorious display of all the perfections of his nature. And although we may not, at present, be able to see that such is the fact, the light of eternity will, no doubt, give us ample satisfaction; and constrain all to exclaim, "Just and righteous are thy judgments, O Lord." God is glorified in the salvation of his people: Let all *give thanks to him that sitteth on the throne.*

4. Finally: All are bound to give thanks to God for having chosen some to salvation; because in this way the happiness of the human family is promoted. The race of man, fallen under the curse of a broken law, and under the sentence of eternal death, could be rescued from misery and restored to happin ss only by the merciful purpose, and almighty agency, of the great God, our Saviour! And ought we not to rejoice, even if that purpose and agency had been employed in delivering but one of the human family? It is an erroneous, selfish, wicked disposition, which denies to others the happiness it cannot itself enjoy. If we are afflicted, ought we not to rejoice that others are exempted from trials? If we are sick, ought we not to rejoice that others are in health? If my children are taken away from me by death,* ought I not to rejoice that yours are spared to you? And if any of us should perish, ought we not to rejoice that others are saved from the wrath to come? If so: Then "we are bound to give thanks to God alway, because from the beginning he has chosen some to salvation, through

* The Author had buried his fifth child but a few days before this sermon was preached.

sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth; whereunto he calls them by the gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Having explained the text, we shall conclude with a few INFERENCES, from what has been said; and

1. We infer from what has been said, *that the opposition of men to the doctrine of election is unreasonable and unscriptural.*

It is unreasonable, because the doctrine is consonant to analogy. Every thing around us is full of election. Divine sovereignty reigns through all the concerns of men. How various are the dispositions, the talents, and the circumstances of men? When you see one man better and wiser than another—one man healthier and richer than another—do you not witness a display of divine sovereignty? Do you not find occasion to say to the distinguished individual, "Who maketh thee to differ from another?"—and are you not constrained to acknowledge, that God *does with his own as seemeth good unto him?* When you discover this variety in the qualifications and circumstances of men, why do you not arraign the Sovereign of the Universe? and demand why all have not the same qualifications, why all are not placed in the same circumstances? and those the highest qualifications and the most eligible circumstances imaginable? Ah! what daily presses before your eyes, convinces you that *God is high over all the earth!* You dare not deny, that God makes a difference between the children of men in this life; and you dare not question his right to do so? But, when we advance to spiritual and eternal things, your hearts rise up in rebellion against God: You no longer say "Thy will be done;" but you impiously attempt to

"Snatch from him the sceptre and the rod—
To judge his justice; and be the god of God!"

This opposition to a doctrine, when applied to eternal things, which we cannot but admit in temporal things, is certainly *unreasonable.*

It is also *unscriptural.* The Bible throughout represents God as sovereign in the dispensation of his favours: It represents him as confirming in holiness a part of the angelic creation—and suffering the rest to fall into remediless ruin: It states that the advantages of revelation were, for successive centuries, confined to one people; while surrounding nations were left ignorant of the true God, and the way of life: It represents him as "having mercy on whom he will have mercy," without accounting for his determination to any of his creatures. "Nay; but O man! who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?"*

Such is the uniform language of Scripture: It every where maintains the sovereignty of Jehovah, and denounces, as presumptuous and impious, all opposition to a doctrine which it so clearly inculcates.

2. We infer from what has been said, *that the objections urged against this doctrine are not well founded.*

The popular objection, that this doctrine destroys all incentives to moral and religious exertions, has already been noticed; and shall therefore, in this place, be passed by in silence.

There are, however, other objections, which it may be proper briefly to notice. 'If the doctrine of election be true,' say our opponents, 'then God is a cruel, unjust, and partial Being, unworthy of the affection and confidence of the intelligent creation.

* Rom. ix. 20, 21.

Before I reply, I beg leave to observe, that man, a dependent creature, entirely at the disposal of God, ought to be exceedingly careful how he taxes God with cruelty, injustice, and partiality. It will be a fearful thing to fall into the hands of that God, against whom such "hard speeches" have been uttered.

But let us notice the charges, which these objections bring against the Holy One of Israel.

1. If the doctrine of election be true, God is a *cruel being*. Cruel? to whom? Certainly not to the elect; for he is all mercy to them. He must then be cruel to the non-elect. But how so? Is it cruel to inflict upon transgressors the penalties of the law, which they have violated? Is the Judge guilty of cruelty, when he sentences to condign punishment such as have deserved it? How, then, can God be considered cruel when he inflicts on transgressors the curse of his law?

But this charge of *cruelty* goes on the supposition, that the condition of the non-elect is now more hopeless than it would be, if God had never decreed the salvation of the elect. 'If it were not,' say they, 'for this election, all might stand a chance to be saved!'—My brethren, you stand as good a chance to be saved now, as you would if the doctrine of election were not true. God has done nothing to increase the difficulties in the case of the reprobate: He has left them just where they were; and just where they had brought themselves: And if they could have been saved, provided God had never proposed to save any, they can be saved still. Where, then, is the cruelty spoken of? It must be in this, that God *pardons many*, while he might justly have *punished all:* But this we are disposed to denominate *mercy*, and not *cruelty*.

2. The second objection charges God with *injustice:* And again we enquire, In what does this injustice consist? In saving the elect, or in punish-

ing the non-elect? Surely not in the former; and as surely not in the latter. So long as God does not punish the sinner without a cause, or more than he has deserved, he cannot be chargeable with injustice. But the reprobate will not be punished without cause, nor beyond measure—"Just and righteous are thy judgments, O Lord."

3. The third objection charges God with *partiality*. To this we reply, that the decree of election manifestly exhibits the sovereignty of God; but gives no occasion for the charge of partiality. *Partiality* is preference, in consequence of real or supposed excellence. Now, in this sense, we say God is no respecter of persons: He discovered nothing that rendered one sinner more inviting, or worthy of favour, than another. There was no predilection—there could be no partiality. As well might it be alledged, that God was partial in electing some of the angels, while he suffered others to fall,—or in giving to Abraham, and his descendants, a revelation of his will, while other nations remained ignorant of the true God, and the gospel scheme of salvation,—or that he is partial, at the present day, in suffering us to possess the Bible, and enjoy the institutions of his grace, while thousands are still destitute of these inestimable privileges. In all these God, indeed, acts the sovereign; and we can only say, "Even so, Father; for so it seemeth good in thy sight."* The propriety and fitness of any thing to be done are sufficiently stated, by resolving it into the wisdom and sovereignty of God, who has done it.

These remarks we consider sufficient to prove, that the objections, urged against the doctrine of election, *are not well founded.*

3. This prepares the way for our third, and last inference, which is this: *The doctrine of election is true; and it is our duty to seek for the evidence of*

* Mat. xi. 26.

our own election. The doctrine, we think, has been proved to be true; and all the opposition we may feel to this, or any other doctrine, can never change the nature of truth. Our great business now is to obtain comfortable evidence of our interest in God's electing love! This is to be done, not by exploring the recesses of divine decrees; but by exercising repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ: For these are the fruits, and the evidences of election; and these excellent graces are to be sought and obtained in the diligent and prayerful use of the means, which God has appointed for the salvation of his people. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find:"* and when in the diligent and prayerful use of means, you have obtained "the sanctification of the Spirit, and the belief of the truth," you will enjoy the best evidence of your eternal and personal election of God!

And now, brethren, having done what I felt it my duty to do, I leave the subject with you, and with my Master—with your Judge, and my Judge! Search the Scriptures, and see whether these things are so: Consult not your feelings, but your Bibles! And ask not, what God might have done; but enquire what he has done.

May the Lord lead you into all truth! and cause you to feel its sanctifying influence on your hearts and practice, for Christ's sake. Amen.

---

* Mat. vii. 7.

The following ADDRESS *on the important, yet neglected duty of* Family Religion, *is from the pen of the Rev. William Jay of Bath, England. The reader will discover in it a few remarks of a local nature; as* a whole, *however, it will be found excellent. I pray it may prove useful.*

AN ADDRESS TO MASTERS OF FAMILIES.

MASTERS OF FAMILIES,

You have often heard, and perhaps always admired the resolution of Joshua. He had gathered all Israel together in Shechem—and thus he addressed them. *If it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord; choose you this day whom ye will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: But as for me, and my house, we will serve the Lord!—This determination derives a considerable force from the person who forms it.* It was Joshua. But who was Joshua? A soldier, a hero, a commander in chief of the armies of the living God, the governor of Israel, the principal man in the state. He it was, who in the presence of an assembled country, was not ashamed to say, *as for me, and my house, we will serve the Lord.*

And does religion degrade talents, tarnish dignity, disparage greatness? It ennobles titles, and adds lustre to a crown.—Are they only the vulgar, the foolish, the dastardly, who profess to acknowledge God? God has been served by persons of all ranks, and of all distinctions. In every age of the world, some of the wise, the mighty, the noble, have been called.—And no where does religion shine to more advantage than in circumstances of elevation.

Nothing is more pleasing than to see a combination of greatness and goodness in the same character. And nothing can be more useful. The higher classes have more opportunities and capacities for doing good than others. They are like a city set upon a hill—they cannot be hid—they are widely visible. Their influence is extensive and powerful. Their example regulates not only manners, but morals: for it would be easy to prove, that morals, equally with fashions, work downward—from superiors to inferiors. If the great distinguish themselves by the profession of truth, the worship of God, the practice of virtue, they will be sure to draw others after them. Whereas if they are infidel, irreligious, vicious, they are infected fountains, poisoning the multitude that drink of the streams, and spreading mischief all around.

Observe also the independence with which the determination is expressed. Joshua was by no means indifferent to the welfare of others: he wished all who heard him to choose the God he had chosen, and serve the God he served. But he cannot allow himself to be influenced by them. If they will not follow him, he resolves to go alone. "O ye seed of Abraham, if you forsake him—which God forbid—not I. If you will not cleave to him, I will; and if there was no individual in the nation, in the world, to accompany me, I would say, as I now do, *as for me, and my house, we will serve the Lord.*"

The case which Joshua here supposes, is neither an impossible or an unusual one. In a thousand instances you will find yourselves alone, if you are resolved to obey the dictates of truth, and the calls of duty. If *the whole world lyeth in wickedness*, and you will be *holy in all manner of conversation and godliness*, you must be singular. If you live among fools, and are wise, you must be singular. If you live among the poor, and are rich, you must be singular.—And it is presumed that you would have no

great objection to this. And why should you be so terrified at the charge of singularity, in a cause infinitely more honourable? Nothing is so excellent as goodness, and no goodness is so praise-worthy as that which is singular. This shews a purity of motive, and a dignity of principle. This argues a grandeur of mind, a soul not meanly enslaved by custom, but asserting its own freedom, and daring to think and act for itself. Such a man does not wait for the company and countenance of others to embolden him; he can venture by himself: And despise the shame—when, as he advances, abandoned crowds pursue him with their sneers and reproaches. Such was Abdiel

> "Faithful found
> Among the faithless, faithful only he:
> Among innumerable false, unmoved,
> Unshaken, unseduced, unterrified,
> His loyalty he kept, his love, his zeal;
> Nor number nor example with him wrought
> To swerve from truth, or change his constant mind
> Though single. From amidst them forth he passed
> Long way through hostile scorn, which he sustained
> Superior; nor of violence feared ought."

—On such a man the Saviour fixes his eye, and cries: *Them that honour me, I will honour. He that confesseth me before men, him will I confess before my Father, and the holy angels. Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life!*

It may be remarked, *that the resolution is personal.* Indeed he begins with *himself.* "As for me, and my house, we will serve the Lord."

Nothing can dispense with an obligation to personal piety. Nothing merely official, or relative; nothing we do for others, while we are destitute of the grace of God in our own souls, can secure us. *Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?* And indeed those who are re-

gardless of their own souls, are not likely to be very attentive to the souls of others. Mere profession, and a regard to decency, may carry you some way; but there is nothing like a personal experience of divine things to inflame zeal. Unless you serve God yourselves, your efforts will be transient, partial, irregular. They are also likely to be unsuccessful. A drunken master is a poor preacher of sobriety to servants. A proud father is a miserable recommender of humility to children. They will do as you do, rather than do as you say. Your example will counteract all the effect of your counsel: and all the convictions you would fix in the mind will bound off, like arrows from an impenetrable shield. *Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? Thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal? Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? Thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege?*

You should therefore begin *both to do and to teach.* You should be able, in a humble measure at least, to say to those who are under your care, *Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.* Personal religion must precede domestic: therefore Joshua does not say, *my house* shall serve him *without me.* But domestic religion must accompany personal; and therefore Joshua does not say *I* will serve him *without my house:* he includes both.

And thus, finally, the determination *is relative and extensive:* as for *me, and my house, we will serve the Lord.*

But the question is—How could he say this? Could he be answerable for his family, as well as for himself? We may consider this two ways—as expressing either his happiness or his duty.

If he could say this from a knowledge of his family—if after observation he was assured of the good and pious dispositions of all those who are

under his care—we should say he was a happy man indeed! This has sometimes been the case; but the privilege is not common.

The words therefore are rather to be considered as an expression of his duty. Not that he supposed it was in the power of his resolution to make the members of his household truly pious. He knew that God alone is the author of conversion—but he knew also that God uses means, and requires us to use them: that it is only in the use of them he has promised his blessing—and therefore that it is only in the use of them we can expect it. Were we to hear a pious husbandman saying: "This year I will have wheat in *this* field, and *yonder* I will have barley," you would not mistake him. He does not mean to intimate that he can produce the grain; but he can manure, and plough, and sow, and weed; he intends to do this; and then to look for the Divine blessing to give the increase.

Thus Joshua resolves to endeavour, in the wise and zealous use of all proper means, to render the family he governs truly religious. He would instruct, reprove, admonish, encourage them. He would address every principle of action; every passion in their bosoms. He would seize every favourable opportunity, improve every striking occurrence, to impress the mind with seriousness. He would cherish every promising appearance. He would lead them to the house of God, and keep them from profaning his holy day. He would pray not only *for* them, but also *with* them: and worship God, not only in the closet, but in the parlour, and with his children and servants in the train.

And this, O ye masters of families, is that which I wish to enforce upon you all! O that I could find out acceptable words, as well as words of truth! O that I knew by what arguments I could induce you

to establish the worship of God in your own houses!

To render our reasoning upon this subject easy of apprehension and remembrance, let me call upon you to consider domestic religion in reference to God—in reference to yourselves—and in reference to your families.

I. Think of it in *reference to God.* To him family religion has a three-fold relation. The first is a relation of *responsibility*. For we are required to glorify God in every condition we occupy, and in every capacity we possess. For instance: If a person be poor, he is commanded to serve God as a poor person: But suppose he should become rich: he would then be required to serve him as rich; and from the time of his acquiring this wealth, he would be tried by the rule of wealth. If a man be single, he is commanded to serve God as single; but no sooner is he placed over a family, than he is required to serve God as the master of a family: and from the moment of his obtaining this new connexion, he will be judged by the duties which belong to it. God has committed to him a trust, and he expects him to be faithful to this trust. He has given him a talent, and he expects him to use this talent. In a word, he has made him a steward, and he will call him to give an account of his stewardship. When, so to speak, the man has been tried, then comes forth to be judged the master of the family?—Bring forth the law of the house——Have you walked by *this* rule?—What have you done for me *here*?—Nothing! Did I not assign you the government of a family: and, to qualify you for this very purpose, did I not give you a peculiar authority and influence? How have you employed them? —Anticipate the proceedings of this awful day, and *judge yourselves, that you may not be condemned with the world!*

The second is a relation *of gratitude.* How nu-

merous and pressing are your obligations to his kindness and his care? He has crowned your wishes, and supplied all your wants. When you were a poor, solitary, insignificant individual, he raised you into consequence, and multiplied you into a family. Behold, *thy wife, like a fruitful vine, by the sides of thy house; and thy children, like olive plants, round about thy table.* Whose *secret has been upon thy tabernacle?* Whose providence has *blessed the labour of thy hands?* Whose vigilance has suffered *no evil to befall thee, nor any plague to come nigh thy dwelling?* And will you basely refuse him the glory which is due unto his holy name? Will you refuse to honour him in a family, in which he has scattered so many blessings? Shall thy house, which should be the temple of his praise, be only the grave of his mercies?

The third is a relation of *dependence.* For can you dispense with God in your dwellings? Are not all your schemes, your exertions, and the assistances you secure, *less than nothing, and vanity,* without his aid and his blessing? *Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it. Except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain. It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows: for so he giveth his beloved sleep.* The wisest course therefore is to secure his favour, who has all events under his control—and *is able to do for us exceeding abundantly, above all we ask or think.* And is this to be done by irreligion?

Observe his promises, and his threatenings; or, rather, let us observe *one* of them. *The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked: but he blesseth the habitation of the just.* What a dreadful look has this scripture towards a wicked family! What a benign aspect towards a righteous one! What a tremendous thing is *the curse of God!* and this does not hover over the building, does not look in at the

window, does not stand at the door—but is *in the house;* spreading through every apartment, and feeding, like a worm, upon all the possessions. You may see the appearance of pleasure; and as you draw nigh, you may *hear music and dancing*—but *there is no peace, saith my God, unto the wicked!* Magnificence may reign there; there may be rich furniture, and a table spread with dainties—but what are all these, when the divine anger has said, *Let their table be made a snare, a trap, and a stumbling-block, and a recompense unto them!* And if this be the case with their good things, what will they do in the evil day? What can be expected under their disappointments, and afflictions, but impatience, and rage, and despair.

But he *blesseth the habitation of the just:* and his blessing, with bread and water, is a good portion. If they have but little, it is sanctified. Their enjoyments are relished. Their trials are alleviated. Religion opens a refuge, when every other refuge fails, and applies a remedy to evils, otherwise remediless. They have a God in trouble; his grace is still the more; and his providence is making all things work together for their good. Their walls are continually before him. The voice of rejoicing, and of salvation, is in the tabernacles of the righteous! This brings you

II. To consider family religion *in reference to yourselves.*

And here, in the first place, you ought to be concerned for your spiritual welfare: you ought to value that which has a tendency to restrain you from sin, and to excite you to holiness. Now, it is easy to see, that the practice we are recommending has such an influence. Can he, who is going to prayer with his family, swear or scold?—Why, he will be upon his guard, if it be only to preserve himself from the charge of hypocrisy. Another feels no such motive: he can indulge himself in bad words, and vile tem-

pers, without incurring the reflection of inconsistency. And because he makes no pretensions to virtue, he may imagine himself at liberty to practise vice.

And upon this principle it is, that many refuse to make a profession of religion—to come to the table of the Lord—and to adopt family worship. They reason properly enough—that in consequence of this they must become more watchful, and circumspect. But what can we think of the principle? What can we think of a man who fears to be restrained from the commission of sin, and to be urged to the performance of duty?

Such a practice also will secure tranquility of mind. The omission of this duty leaves a sting in the conscience, occasions many a bitter reflection through life, and plants a dying pillow with thorns! When you see those who are placed under your care, going astray, becoming the victims of error, and vice, and misery, it will not be easily in your power to suppress the rising, or to soothe the painful accusation: "Ah! this might have been prevented, had you discharged your duty! Does not their destruction lie at your door?" But the man who has faithfully discharged his obligation, feels an internal composure. If indeed his efforts be not crowned with success, he will lament; but this grief differs very materially from that torture which springs from self-condemnation, for a trust betrayed, for opportunities neglected, for exertions omitted. He has a satisfaction under all his distress: and his rejoicing is this, the testimony of his conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not by fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God he has had his conversation in the world, and more abundantly towards his own family.

But surely you are not indifferent to your temporal circumstances. You wish to have peace and order in your dwelling: you wish to have your pro-

perty secured, and your business well performed: you wish to see fidelity, diligence, submission: you wish to be honoured and obeyed. But do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Surely you cannot expect these things to be produced without principle; and what principle can so certainly and fully produce them as religion—what else can enforce them by sanctions, and motives, so awful, so binding, and which operate equally in all places, and at all times?—and thus secure the performance of duty, when you are absent as well as present? By teaching them to regard God, you teach them to regard yourselves. Piety is the firmest basis on which to build morality:—To which we may add, that when religion is fairly exemplified in character, there is a majesty, and a force in it: it surrounds the possessor with an awe that represses a thousand impertinencies, and extorts respect. *Abraham commanded his children, and his household after him;* and what a son had he in Isaac—what a servant in Eleazar!

Let us therefore consider this subject,

III. *In reference to your family.* The members which compose it are, in reality, parts of yourselves; children are natural parts, and servants are civil parts of yourselves. These have therefore peculiar claims upon you; and were you to avow that you had no regard for them, and would do nothing that could advance their welfare, what would people think of you? If in the cold you denied your servants warmth; if you give them bad food, and short allowance; if you turned them out of doors as soon as they were sick, and they knew not where to lay their head; the world would cry, "You wretch!" If you were to suffer your children to go naked, to beg their bread, to perish with hunger in a ditch, or to take your little ones, and dash them against the stones—you would be shunned as a monster! But you act a far more criminal, and a far more infamous

part, by disregarding their spiritual and everlasting welfare! Doubtless Herod, after killing the infants in Bethlehem, was viewed and shunned with horror, —but he was far less cruel than you: he only destroyed the body—you damn the soul: he only slew the children of others—but you murder your own!—*If any provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.* And can you imagine you have done this, when you have endeavoured to answer the question, *what shall they eat, and what shall they drink, and wherewithal shall they be clothed?* What is the body to the soul—what is time to eternity? You may amass for them riches—you may leave to them an estate; but your house is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death!

Under this article, let us observe more distinctly, two things.

The first is the importance of religion to the individuals under your care. Is it not *the one thing needful?* Is it not *profitable to all things? having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come?*—You cannot deny this. Can you then be indifferent to the religion of your offspring, without being indifferent to their welfare? While you say, by your practice, that it is nothing to you whether they be pious or vicious—do you not, at the same time, and in the most undeniable manner, declare, that it is nothing to you whether they be respectable or infamous, loved or abhorred of God, saved, or lost for ever?

And the second is this—the probability of their becoming religious by your means. Baxter gives it as his opinion, that if family religion was duly attended to, the public preaching of the word would not long be the common method of conversion. Without adopting this sentiment in all its extent, we may observe that there is certainly enough to encou-

rage the heads of families to exert themselves, and to condemn them if they do not. If the crop be so valuable, who would not sow, especially if he could *sow in hope?* And who knows not the force of early impressions, and the strength of early habits? Who has not read, *Train up a child in the way that he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.* In such families, there has generally been a seed to serve the Lord. And this has appeared not only in children: for how often have servants had reason to say—"Blessed be God that ever I entered that family: there were the eyes of my understanding opened; and there were my feet turned into the way of peace."

MASTERS AND PARENTS,

I have thus endeavoured to bring into a small compass the arguments for the worship of God in your families. On a subject so frequently discussed, novelty was not to be expected; but I hope that what has been said, will be found sufficient to convince your judgment, and determine your practice.

I cannot conclude the address, without lamenting that there is so little attention paid to family worship, in a country professedly Christian, and in a period supposed to witness an increase of godly zeal. There is no more religion in the families of some who pretend to believe the Scripture, than there would be if they were Atheists: To see many attending so regularly and frequently the preaching of the gospel, would lead to a conclusion, or at least a hope, that they were the true worshippers of God; but when we follow them home to their own dwellings, we find them no better than heathens. Heathens! Forgive me this wrong—I blaspheme you by the comparison: you had your household gods, which you daily worshipped, and which nothing could induce you to resign.—I only ask you to be consistent. If you are Christians, *be* Christians. If you are Israelites, be Israelites *indeed!*

It may be asked, whether we imagine that there is any *peculiar* deficiency with regard to family devotion in *our day?* And to this we readily answer, we are persuaded there is: and it appears both in the frequent neglect, and the superficial performance of it, especially contrasted with the commonness of profession, and the frequency of public ordinances. We wish to speak freely; but without meaning to give offence. It is easy to see in the lives of our good old forefathers, what a value they set upon the morning and evening worship of God in their houses. With them it was an object, and an object of first-rate importance: they entered upon it with seriousness and preparation: they arranged their worldly business, and their household affairs, in a subserviency to it: *Public* worship did not exclude it, or drive it up into a corner. But of late years an undue stress has been laid on public exercises; and opportunities of hearing have been so multiplied, as to produce a kind of religious dissipation—so that persons of a religious character, as well as persons of a worldly, are seldom at home: there is some entertainment every evening in the week; and every hour of the S bbath. And hence there is very little inclination or time for family duty. It is so much easier to go and lounge in a place of worship, and hear some new performer, than to retire into the closet to examine the heart, and call together a family, and endeavour to instruct and impress them, that we cannot help wondering how it was ever possible for the former to be looked upon as a greater test of piety than the latter!—God forbid that we should decry public worship, or the preaching of the word, he has commanded us *not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is:* But that man is surely under a mistake who thinks to please God by incessantly running from one public opportunity to another, while he

leaves his children to run wild, to grow up in ignorance, and to profane the Sabbath.

I have stated the case strongly; but where this evil does not prevail in the extreme, it operates in the degree—and I cannot help sincerely wishing that the cause of the complaint could be removed. It is very desirable, that useful bodies of men should be rendered more useful; and this, in the case before us, could be easily done, if those who have the lead would more strenuously inculcate the importance of family religion, and regulate the length and frequency of their public services accordingly.

There is another thing, which, because it has a relation to the subject before us, I notice. Of late years, a considerable number of persons not in the ministry have been stimulated to go of a Saturday evening, or a Sunday morning, into the towns and villages, as occasional preachers. The motive was laudable; but it has also contributed to the effect we have deplored: Families are thus frequently bereaved of their head on the Sabbath—and who knows not that the Sabbath is the principal day in which men of business can be much, in a religious sense, with their families? I hardly know how to censure this; and I do not, in every instance. But it may be well to ask, whether God ever calls us to a course which requires us to neglect or violate those duties which he has enjoined in his word? In a general way the ministry requires a man's whole attention. And when Providence has furnished the means of a respectable introduction to the office by institutions for improvement, it is a duty to avail ourselves of them.

But to return. Let me beseech masters of families, with all imaginable importunity, not to think this practice a matter of indifference, which they are at liberty to perform or neglect. It is a duty: it is a duty of unspeakable importance! Do not therefore

put it off longer: Begin this very evening; and before you lie down in your beds honour God in your families!

—"We have not time!" But what time does it require? Out of four and twenty hours cannot you furnish a few moments for God, or rather for yourselves? Would you think that time lost which is best employed? "There is nothing got by stealing, or lost by praying." Surely if you have no time at present, you could redeem a little by order, by economy, by diligence? To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heavens.

"But I have not capacity!" Have you ever fairly made the trial? Would not your ability increase by exercise?—Is it not a want of inclination rather than of power? "Where there is a will, there is a way." And this would be the case here: for you would find that, if incapable of leading the devotion of the family extemporaneously, you could furnish yourselves with excellent forms; and it is to be lamented that prejudice should ever preclude the use of them when it is needful.

"But—I have neglected it so long, that I am ashamed to begin!" You ought to be ashamed of sin, but not of duty. You ought to be ashamed that you have lived so long without it; but you ought not to be ashamed that you are wiser and better than you once were.—Again. You say, "If"——But I will answer no more of your objections. They are only excuses: and you know—yes, you know—that they do not satisfy your consciences now, and will avail you nothing in the great and terrible day of the Lord!

But some of you live in the habit of family worship. It will not, therefore, be amiss to conclude with a few words by way of direction.

Be spiritual in the performance. There is great danger of formality, where things customarily re-

turn, and with little possibility of variation. Think of God. Remember with whom you have to do—and what you have to do with him.

Do not confine family worship to prayer. Include also reading the Scripture, and, if possible, singing the praises of God.

Be short. A few minutes of simple and affectionate devotion is far better than eking out nearly half an hour, by doubling over the name of God, telling the Supreme Being what he is, and by vain repetitions.

Be early. Do not leave it till the family are drowsy and stupid.—But here a case of conscience occurs, and such, alas! as the inconsistencies of the present day would render too common. "When should those of us have family worship, who attend public amusements? for instance—the theatre." I answer, by all means, have it *before you go.* When you return, it will be too late; and you may not feel yourselves quite so well affected towards it. We have known professors, who have always omitted it when they came home from the play-house. Besides, if you have it before, you can implore the divine blessing; beseech God to be with you; and to assist you in redeeming time, in overcoming the world, in preparing for eternity.

Reader! You may imagine that the author has written this with a smile—but he has written it with shame and grief. He earnestly wishes that many would adopt family worship; but he is free to confess that there are some, of whom he should be glad to hear that they had laid it aside!

A PERSUASIVE TO PUBLIC WORSHIP.

(A Tract.)

THAT the public worship of Almighty God is habitually neglected by a great number of those who "profess, and call themselves Christians," is a fact, too obvious to need proof. The churches, in some places, are nearly deserted; while the fields, the roads, and the public houses, are crowded! Upon an accurate calculation, made in some of the largest towns in America, it has been found, that, at least, two-thirds of the inhabitants absent themselves from the house of God! How awful is the idea, that, supposing a city to contain 12,000 people, no less than 8,000 of them live in the constant neglect of their duty! But, surely, these "things ought not so to be!"

Is it not reasonable that we should worship God? In him we "live, and move, and have our being?" And is it not right and becoming to acknowledge our dependence on him? Is God the only King and Governor, to whom no homage should be paid? And as man is a social being, and disposed to unite with his fellow men for civil purposes, it seems agreeable to reason, and the nature of man, that human creatures should associate together in the service of God, to confess their sins, to implore his mercy, to obtain his grace, and to praise him for blessings already received!

This has been the general practice of all nations of the world, and in every age of it. We read of Cain and Abel, and the sons of Adam, appearing before God, and probably at the head of their families, with their different offerings. In early days, every father of a family acted as its priest. The history of the Bible, which is the oldest in the

world, fully shows that Noah, Abraham, Joshua, and all the ancient worthies, thus worshipped the God of their fathers. And when a great part of the earth had corrupted themselves by idolatry, God was pleased to restore the true worship by a revelation of his will to Moses. A variety of regulations were ordained by God himself, and for many ages observed by the Jews. The divine presence and glory were frequently manifested as tokens of his approbation; and when, at any time they neglected his service, terrible calamities befel them as marks of his displeasure.

Our Saviour *himself frequented public worship* in the temple, and other places. He gave directions for the right performance of it, "in spirit and in truth." He plainly intimates in the Lord's prayer, that we should pray *with*, and *for* others, by teaching us to say "*our* Father," "Give *us* our daily bread," "forgive *us* our trespasses," &c. Jesus Christ having finished the work he came to perform, ascended up into heaven—but promised shortly to send down his Holy Spirit. While the disciples waited for his gift, they continued daily "with one accord in prayer and supplication." It was when they were thus employed that the Holy Ghost descended; and by his heavenly influence, enabled them to preach "Christ crucified" to the multitude with amazing success. The first Christian converts abounded in the acts of public worship; "they continued daily with one accord in the temple." In early times they certainly met together, by daybreak on the Lord's Day, "to sing praise to Christ, as their God and Saviour." The Lord's supper was administered very frequently; and the history of the church shews, that, from that time to this, the public worship of God has always been attended by the great body of professing Christians of all denominations. It is therefore a new thing, that those who bear the sacred name should desert the house

of God: it is evidently contrary to the universal practice of Christians for 1800 years.

Public worship is strongly recommended by the many great advantages derived from it. Hereby a friendly intercourse is maintained between the different ranks of society. These are apt to dislike each other: and their different situations keep them at a distance: But in the house of God "the rich and poor meet together: the Lord is the Maker of them all." By uniting in the same acts of humility, prayer, praise, and instruction, a union of spirit and interests is promoted: they learn to care for each other—"to bear one another's burdens, and to fulfil the law of Christ."

Nor is it an advantage of small importance to the lower ranks of mankind, that the habit of attending public worship, and a laudable desire to appear with decency before others, excite diligence, promote cleanly dress, and are consequently conducive to health: while it is too obvious that the slothful man, who disregards the Sabbath and the worship of God, often neglects the care of his person, and is covered with filth and rags.

Morality is also promoted by public worship. The services of God's house have a direct tendency to produce and increase that "fear of God, which is the beginning of wisdom." Persons do not usually proceed to extreme lengths in open iniquity, who meet every week to confess their past sins, to pray for mercy, and to hear from the pulpit the commandments, threatenings, and promises of God. Look around you, and you will observe that atrocious and desperate sinners usually abandon the worship of God altogether; for, according to an old saying, "Praying will make a man leave off sinning, or sinning will make him leave off praying."

Divine worship is well calculated to prevent an excessive love of the world. People who are busily employed all the week in worldly affairs, find them

hearts too prone to "cleave to the dust." It is therefore of great use to be directed on the Lord's day to the great objects of faith: to be reminded of the vanity of the world, the uncertainty of life, the approach of death; and to have our views extended towards the eternal world, and the different states in which saints and sinners will ere long be for ever fixed.

But the greatest advantage of public worship is, that there we obtain a knowledge of "the glorious gospel of the blessed God." Jesus Christ, the great Head of the Church, has commanded that his gospel should be preached to every creature; and a command to *preach* it, certainly includes a command to *hear* it. The Gospel signifies *good news*, "glad tidings of great joy to all people,"—namely, that "God so loved the world, that he sent his Son to be our Saviour, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life!" The Gospel is a proclamation of God's mercy through Christ, to sinners ready to perish! "Therein the righteousness of God, by faith, is revealed to faith;" even that righteousness which Christ wrought out by his obedience and death; a righteousness such as the law demands—such as we are destitute of;—but such a one as we must have—or perish! This righteousness is held forth to sinners; and becomes the righteousness of every one who sees his need of it, and is enabled to trust in it for his own acceptance with God!

The same Jesus, who commanded this Gospel to be preached, has promised to be with those who preach it to the end of the world. He has also declared, that "wherever two or three meet in his name, he will be in the midst of them." These promises should induce us all to be diligent hearers of the word. Our Saviour has said, "Blessed are they who hear the word of God, and keep it." Paul says, "It is the power of God to salvation:" It is

the grand instrument which God has appointed, and which he blesses for the purpose of regeneration, or making us new creatures. Hereby the ignorant become "wise unto salvation." Hereby sinners are brought to repentance. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God;" and it is by faith that the heart is purified, the conscience cleansed, affliction softened, and holiness promoted.

These are some of the great advantages which attend the worship of God. What an enemy then to himself is that person, who wilfully and habitually neglects the service of God, and thereby renounces them all;—and for what? What equal advantages can be proposed? Is a walk, or a ride in the country, or a visit to a friend, or any amusement whatever, of equal value? Certainly not. These are short lived pleasures at best; but the blessings derived from the service of God are solid, spiritual, and everlasting. It is thus the soul is formed for the worship of God above, and prepared to join the general assembly of the church triumphant.

These arguments seem of sufficient weight to convince any man, who believes the Scripture, that the public worship of God is a "reasonable service." How is it then that thousands, in this Christian country, dare to live in the neglect of it? Those who reflect upon it must certainly form some excuses, which appear plausible to themselves, and serve to still their consciences. But it is highly probable, that the greater part of those who neglect this duty never reflect upon the subject; but give themselves up to a careless, thoughtless temper. Such, however, would do well to consider their ways. Man is a rational being; and it is his duty to consider his relation to his Creator—the duty he owes him—and his own personal safety in reference to the eternal world, whither he is hastening.

If indeed any have drunk the deadly poison of infidelity, we need not wonder at their defection,

nor that "they set their mouth against the heavens, and defy the Holy One of Israel:" but it may be charitably hoped that their number is comparatively small, and that the greater part rather *forget* God, than *defy* him; that they deceive themselves by vain excuses, which, upon second thoughts, they may be willing to lay aside. Indeed the infidelity of some ought to be an argument with others to confess Christ crucified before men. Now is the time for us to shew "who is on the Lord's side;" nor can they be thought his friends, who are unwilling to avow it, by uniting in his public service.

It may be proper here to consider some of those objections, which are frequently urged by way of excuse.

One says, "*I can serve God just as well at home, by reading a good book, as if I went to church.*" It is to be feared, that many who make this objection do not employ much of their time in reading, especially in reading *religious books*. That some parts of the Sabbath should be spent in reading and retirement is certainly right, and very commendable; but one duty is not to displace another. We have already seen that Christ has appointed public worship; and if you are a Christian, you must obey his laws. It is not for you to set up your private opinion against the authority of Heaven: to despise the ministers and ordinances of God is to despise him; and no pretence of serving him as well another way will be admitted. If you carefully examine your own heart, you will probably find that it is sinful sloth, prejudice, and self-conceit.

Another objector cries: "*I do not see that people who go to church so much, are any better than their neighbours.*" If they are not it is their own faults; for they have better means of improvement, and ought to excel. But "who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth." Perhaps he might be much worse if he did

not go to church; and you might be much better if you did; for you will surely admit that there is room for amendment. But your neighbour's conduct is not the rule of your duty. Leave him to God, while you obey the divine command.

Another absents himself, *because he does not like the preacher, his voice, his manner, or his conduct offends.* You would do well seriously to consider how far your dislike of the minister is well founded. Perhaps you never prayed for him in your life: How then could you expect to profit by his ministry? But, if you have sufficient reason to dislike his doctrine, because it is unscriptural, or his life because it is immoral, you are at liberty to attend elsewhere. "Take heed what, and how you hear." "Prove all things, and hold fast that which is good."

Mean apparel is the objection of thousands more: the poor are ashamed to appear in rags among their well dressed neighbours. But, remember, "the Lord seeth not as a man seeth." Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh at the heart. "If you worship him in spirit and truth," your service will not be less accepted because of your mean attire. The poor man may be clean, and then no one will despise him, whose opinion is worth minding. Wait then upon God; It is his blessing that maketh rich: He can prosper the work of your hands, enable you to procure the comforts of life, or raise up charitable friends to assist you; and nothing is more likely to procure them, than your steady and serious attention to public worship. Good men will observe, pity, and assist you.

Too many plead the incumbrance of *young children* as an excuse; and many poor women are not at church for years together. But scarcely any ought to be wholly hindered by a family. The father, or an elder child, where no servant is kept, should stay at home by turns; or neighbours may

do this friendly office for one another occasionally. Some contrivances of this kind will be made if there be an inclination: for other purposes they are made.

But, indeed, *the want of inclination* is the greatest hindrance of all, and the true objection of most. But what does this discover? It shews the want of the fear and love of God. It shews the power of a carnal mind, "alienated from the life of God." It proves a person to be in a state of nature, and a child of wrath. "O consider this, ye that forget God, lest he tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver!"

Take in good part these plain hints—these faithful cautions—dictated by a sincere desire to promote your present and eternal welfare. Duty to God, your own best interest, the influence of example, and the good of your country, all invite you to the house of God! Delay no longer; and however long you may have neglected his service, and forsaken your own mercies, let the very next Sabbath find you in a Christian assembly. May God incline your heart to his service, which is perfect freedom! May his churches be crowded with sincere worshippers,—may they echo with his praises,—may they resound with the glad tidings of salvation;—and thus may thousands be made "joyful in his house for ever!" And O that every reader may sincerely add, *Amen and Amen!*

FINIS.

DEC 2 0 1928